

State High School Exit Exams: A Challenging Year

August 2006

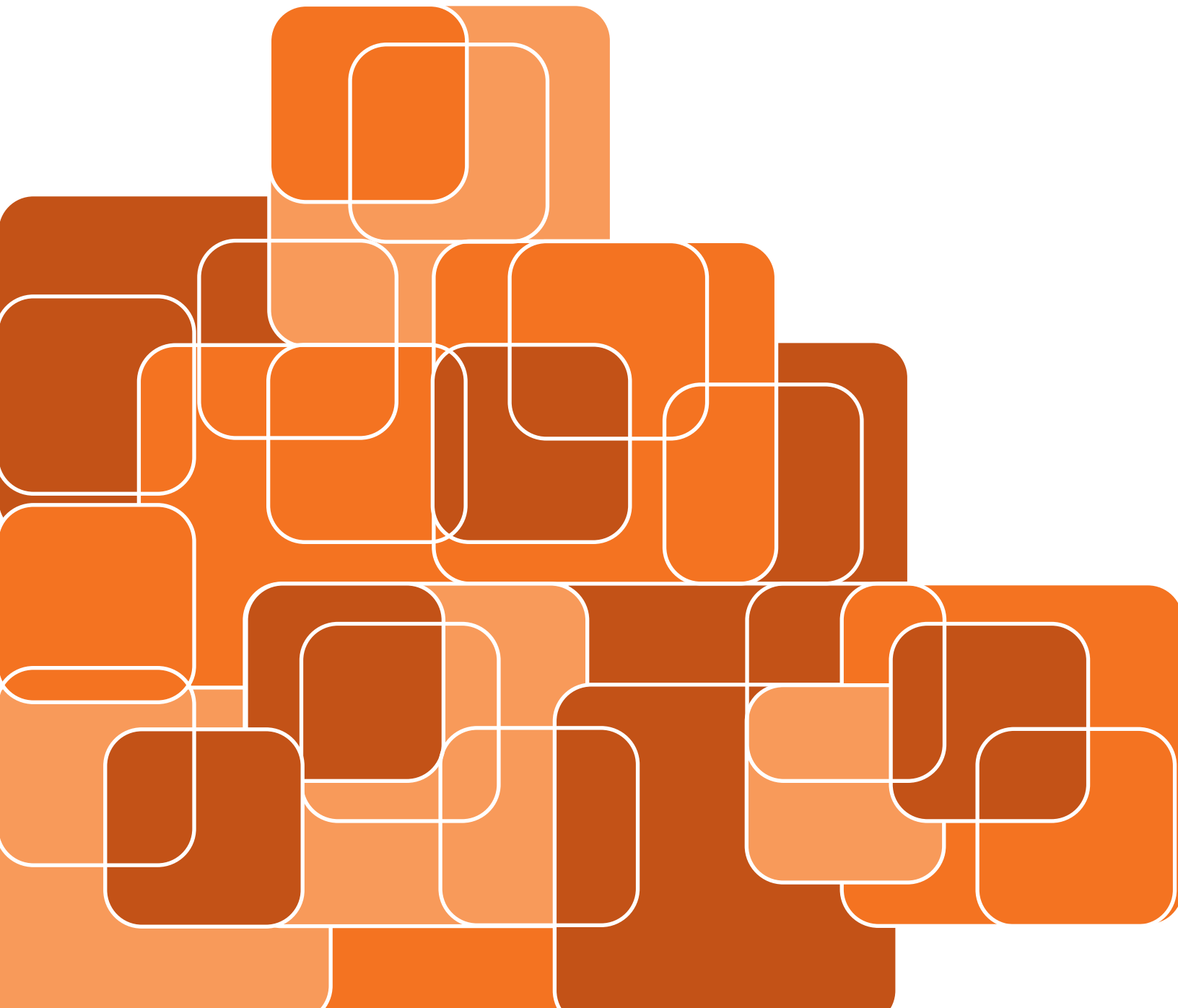
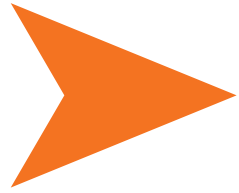


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Summary and Methods

School year 2005-06 was a time of serious challenges to state exit examinations—tests students must pass to receive a high school diploma. In California and Arizona—two states that were withholding diplomas from high school seniors for the first time based on exam performance—courts weighed the constitutionality and fairness of exit exams, as thousands of high school seniors waited to see if they would graduate with the rest of their class. California students at risk of not graduating breathed a sigh of relief when a superior court overturned the exit exam requirement, only to see it reinstated by the state Supreme Court two weeks later. In several states, policymakers debated whether to stick to their plans to withhold diplomas from students who failed exit exams, whether to exempt students with disabilities or students learning English from having to pass the exams, or whether to create or expand alternate paths to graduation for students struggling to pass the exams.

Since 2002, the Center on Education Policy (CEP), an independent nonprofit organization, has been conducting a comprehensive study of state high school exit exams. This is the Center's fifth annual report on this study. The information in this report comes primarily from our survey of all 25 states that currently have or are phasing in mandatory exit exams, and focuses mostly on changes that have occurred since our 2005 report, *State High School Exit Exams: States Try Harder but Gaps Persist*.

Broad Conclusions

Based on our findings from this year's study, the Center reached four broad conclusions about state high school exit exams.

Conclusion 1: Growth in the number of states adopting new exit exam requirements seems to have leveled off. Still, exit exams are a force in education, currently affecting two-thirds of the nation's high school students.

- **Three more states began withholding diplomas, but one state backed off.** California, Arizona, and Idaho followed through with their plans to begin withholding diplomas based on exit exams in 2006. But Utah policymakers decided not to withhold diplomas as planned in 2006, opting instead to note on students' diplomas whether they passed or did not pass the state competency exam. As a result of these changes, 22 states required students to pass an exam to receive a high school diploma in 2006. Three additional states are phasing in exit exams, so that by 2012, 25 states expect to have these exams in place—one fewer than we reported last year, due to Utah's policy change.

- **No new states adopting exit exam requirements.** In contrast to previous years of our study, no state decided in 2006 to adopt a new exit exam requirement, beyond those states that had already made a commitment to phase in new exit exams. States that are considering adding an exit exam requirement may be waiting to see how the legal challenges in California and Arizona turn out.
- **Alternatives to exit exams.** Among the 25 states that do not have exit exams as defined by CEP, several states have chosen to use high school tests in other ways to motivate students to perform well. For example, at least 10 states mark state exam scores on students' diplomas or give out diplomas with some form of distinction to students who perform satisfactorily on state exams. Furthermore, some of the momentum for high school reform seems to have shifted toward policies for making sure students are ready for college. For example, five states currently require all students to take the SAT or ACT college entrance exams as a way to encourage more students to consider postsecondary education.
- **Exit exams still influential.** In 2006, 65% of the nation's public high school students and 76% of the nation's minority public high school students were enrolled in school in the 22 states with current exit exams. By 2012, an estimated 71% of public high school students and 81% of minority public high school students will be enrolled in school in the 25 states that expect to have exit exams in place.

Conclusion 2: Controversy about exit exams tends to settle down in the years after diplomas are first withheld.

- **Conflict in a few states.** During the past year, most of the policy debate and public opposition to exit exams were concentrated in a few states that were slated to begin withholding diplomas based on exam performance in 2006—most notably, California, Arizona, and Utah. Exit exam requirements were also a topic of debate among policymakers in Washington State, which is scheduled to begin withholding diplomas in 2008.
- **Less controversy in Idaho.** Idaho, which began withholding diplomas in 2006 but was not the target of a major lawsuit, experienced relatively less controversy in implementing its exit exam requirement. This may be at least partly because Idaho has instituted several alternate routes for meeting the exam requirement and has set its passing score for 2006 at what state officials consider to be an 8th grade level of performance. Over the next two years, the state will raise its passing scores to a 9th grade level of performance in 2007 and a 10th grade level in 2008. Also, Idaho had used the same state test for other purposes before it became an exit exam, so familiarity with the test may have helped with its acceptance.
- **Exit exams more institutionalized in other states.** In most other states with exit exams, the past year has been a relatively quiet one on the exit exam front. Generally, once a state has weathered the initial opposition to an exit exam and moved ahead with implementing it, dissent decreases and exit exams become a more accepted part of everyday high school life.
- **Factors affecting acceptance of exams.** Various factors influence the degree of conflict in a state about exit exams. For example, these exams may be more controversial in diverse states that enroll large numbers of students of color and English language learners (ELLs). In these states, disparities in pass rates among different groups of students are more glaring, have a greater impact on overall pass rates, and raise questions about whether all groups are receiving the same quality of education. Other factors affecting public acceptance of exit exams appear to be the availability of funding for remedial programs, the existence of alternate paths, the lead-in time before diplomas are withheld, and the difficulty of the exam's content and passing scores.

Conclusion 3: With few exceptions, states have moved toward greater flexibility in their exit exam policies.

- **Additional alternate paths.** Over the past year, at least three states—Arizona, Washington, and Maryland—have expanded their alternate paths for allowing struggling students to obtain a diploma. Examples of alternate paths for general education students (those who are neither special education students nor English language learners) include permitting students to meet the exam requirement by substituting scores on other tests like the SAT or ACT; taking a state-developed alternative assessment; pursuing a waiver or appeals process; receiving credit toward exam scores for satisfactory course grades; demonstrating competency by providing other evidence; and using various combinations of options. California, where policymakers have chosen not to allow alternatives for general education students, is a notable exception.
- **Accepting other states' test scores.** Nine states—four more states than last year—reported in 2006 that they allow transfer students to submit passing scores on other states' tests instead of making students pass their own exit exam. In more than half of these states, the tests in question do not have to be exit exams. Still, 15 states do not accept other states' test scores.
- **More options for students with disabilities.** In general, states have added more options for students with disabilities. Eight states have either delayed exit exam requirements for students with disabilities or exempted these students from having to pass their exit exam. All states have some type of alternate path to help students with disabilities meet graduation requirements.
- **Cumulative effect of expanded options.** Creating more flexible options for students to meet graduation requirements can ensure that students with special needs or circumstances are treated fairly and can strengthen support for the exam by raising pass rates. But too much flexibility can dilute the purpose and value of an exit exam. An exit exam system with too many ways around the basic requirement can end up looking much the same as the exam systems found in states that use test scores as one factor in graduation decisions but do not withhold diplomas based solely on a failure to pass a test. It's difficult to say whether the array of options available in some states represents too much flexibility—partly because information is not readily available on the percentage of students using various options.

Conclusion 4: Most states with exit exams require school districts to provide remediation to students who fail the exams, but these states don't always pay for remediation. The amount of state funding for remediation appears to diminish once the exam requirement has been in effect for a few years.

- **State remediation policies and funding.** Of the 25 states with current or planned exit exams, 18 states require school districts to offer remediation to students who do not pass portions of the exams. Only 14 of these states provide state funding for remediation or related student support programs, while the remaining 11 states do not.
- **Emerging pattern in remediation spending.** California, Arizona, and Washington—three states in which exit exams have just become or will soon become a graduation requirement—have boosted spending on remediation. California has almost tripled its spending on remediation during the past year,

from about \$20 million for 2005-06 to more than \$57 million for 2006-07, while Washington plans to spend more than \$28 million on remediation in 2006-07. By contrast, Indiana and Massachusetts, two states where exit exam requirements took effect a few years ago, have reduced spending for remediation. This emerging pattern could be occurring because the need for remediation diminishes as instruction becomes better aligned with standards and exams, or because media and public scrutiny of the exit exam fades over time, lessening political pressure for remediation.

Specific Findings by Topic

In addition to reaching four broad conclusions, CEP identified several key findings about specific aspects of exit exams. What follows are the most notable findings, other than those covered in the broad findings above. Readers should also review the additional key findings at the beginning of each chapter and the conclusions at the end of each chapter.

New Developments in Exit Exams (chapter 1)

- **A momentous year for legal challenges.** Lawsuits in California and Arizona have delved into such fundamental questions as students' opportunity to learn the material being tested, the fairness of exam requirements, and the responsibility of states to fund preparation and remediation programs. Although some lawsuits relating to students with disabilities have been successful, the courts have generally been reluctant in recent years to overturn exit exam requirements. As this report went to press, courts in California and Arizona were considering key cases. Depending on the outcomes, the court decisions of 2006 could continue the trend of exit exams withstanding legal challenges or could mark a shift in courts' opinions that might stall the exit exam movement in other states.

State Efforts to Help Students Pass Exit Exams (chapter 2)

- **Effectiveness of remediation.** Remediation is effective in raising pass rates on state tests, according to recent research. Although states are still trying to identify which types of remediation programs are most beneficial, some factors have emerged as influential. For example, remediation offered during the regular school day seems to be more effective than afternoon and weekend sessions. And some administrative structures, such as assigning local staff to work solely on coordinating remediation, appear to be more effective than others.
- **Variations in funding for remediation.** Many states did not or could not report how much they spent on remediation specifically for exit exams. Often this was because this spending is subsumed under broader state budget items, such as funding for programs to help students in all grades pass assessments. Among the six states that did report specific amounts for exit exam remediation, state funding ranged from more than \$2 million in Louisiana to more than \$57 million in California.
- **Importance of student motivation and attendance.** Low student motivation and poor attendance are major barriers to the effectiveness of remediation. To improve pass rates, states must find ways to improve student motivation, particularly among the lowest-performing students.

Impact of Exit Exams (chapter 3)

- **Impact on dropouts.** New studies show that exit exams may have a negative effect on graduation rates. But having to pass an exit exam to graduate is just one of many factors that influence a students' decision to drop out, and does not seem to be one of the most significant factors. One Massachusetts study found that although students who did not pass the exit exam dropped out at higher rates than other students, many students who dropped out *did* pass the exam.

- **Pass rates.** The percentage of students passing exit exams on the first try varies across states, but tends to range from about 70% to 90%. In most states, initial pass rates changed only slightly between 2004 and 2005, but a few states saw more marked increases or decreases, including reductions in the gaps in pass rates between various subgroups of students. Still, alarming gaps in pass rates remain for minority students, low-income students, students with disabilities, and English language learners. Trends in cumulative pass rates—the percentage of students who pass exit exams before the end of 12th grade—are difficult to discern because many states do not have or report these data and because calculations may exclude students who drop out before the last exit exam administration.
- **Impact on curriculum.** According to our state survey respondents, exit exams are encouraging teachers to spend more class time on tested subjects. A few states reported that these exams were encouraging students to take more math courses or take courses like algebra earlier.
- **Areas for more research.** Additional research is needed on the following questions related to student impacts: Do students learn more as a result of exit exams? Do exit exams improve student motivation? What strategies are effective for helping low-performing groups of students do better on exit exams and for closing achievement gaps? What types of remediation work best?
- **Use of exit exams by colleges.** Currently public postsecondary institutions in just four states use exit exams for admissions.

Test Characteristics, Development, and Use (chapter 4)

- **Increased rigor.** State exit exams are most often based on 10th grade proficiency standards; a few states align their exams to the 8th and 9th grade levels and some others to the 11th and 12th grade levels. (The grades to which each state's exit exam is aligned and other key characteristics of the exams are shown in **table 1** at the end of this summary.) Several states reported making their exams more challenging—primarily by moving from minimum competency exams to standards-based or end-of-course exams, or by increasing the scores required to pass the exams. This move toward exams based on higher grade-level standards may spur more postsecondary institutions to consider students' exit exams scores when making admissions decisions.
- **More subjects tested.** More states are adding science and social studies to the list of subjects assessed by exit exams. All 25 states with current or planned exit exams test in English language arts and mathematics, but only 11 states also test in science and only 9 in social studies. By 2012, 19 states with exit exams plan to test in science and 13 in social studies.
- **No Child Left Behind and exit exams.** Twenty of the 25 states that have or are phasing in exit exams use these exams to fulfill the high school testing requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). But eight of these states use different passing scores—usually lower scores—for awarding diplomas than for determining proficiency under NCLB.

Student Options for Meeting Graduation Requirements (chapter 5)

- **Retesting policies.** States give students multiple opportunities to retake exit exams before and after 12th grade, but they vary in the number of opportunities provided. All 25 states with current or planned exit exams allow students who do not pass the test on the first attempt to retake the test, and 24 states allow a number of retest opportunities after students complete 12th grade.
- **Alternate paths for English language learners and students with disabilities.** English language learners and students with disabilities tend to have the lowest pass rates on exit exams of any groups. Alternate paths to graduation for English language learners are far less common than those for students with disabilities. Only 4 of the 25 states with current or planned exit exams offer special options, other than test accommodations, for ELLs.

Study Methods

The Center on Education Policy used a variety of methods to identify issues and collect information for this year's study. In particular, we took the following steps:

- Conducted a detailed survey of states with current or planned exit exams
- Reviewed major research conducted by others on exit exams
- Kept abreast of important events related to exit exams

State Survey Methods

As our primary research tool for this year's study, CEP designed and conducted a survey of state department of education officials, usually officials from the state's assessment department. In April 2006, we contacted the chief state school officers of 26 states (including Utah) that had current or planned exit exams to request their state's participation. We asked the chiefs to designate a person to work with us in developing the state profiles for this report.

In May and June 2006, we contacted these designated officials and asked them to verify, update, and add information to survey forms for their state that the Center staff had partially filled in, based on information we had collected and reported in 2005. All 26 states that we believed met our criteria (see below) for having an exit exam responded to our survey. After reviewing Utah's survey responses and talking with officials in that state, we decided that Utah no longer met our criteria for reasons explained below. This brought the total of states with current or planned exit exams to 25.

We used the states' survey responses to develop the state profiles at the end of this report. After developing the profiles, we sent drafts back to states for review to ensure that we had accurately portrayed their testing systems. We also used state survey responses to calculate the tallies of state exam characteristics, policies, and actions that appear throughout the report.

Some states did not answer all of the survey questions, often simply because the data were not available at the state level or their policies were in flux. We have tried our best to include accurate and up-to-date information in this report, but undoubtedly some statistics or policies will have changed soon after publication because events in this field move so quickly.

Other Methods

The Center staff and consultants also conducted literature reviews of relevant studies that were published or publicized during the past year. In addition, we tracked media coverage of exit exams and searched state department of education Web sites for exit exam developments and information.

Criteria for Including States in Our Study

This study focuses on mandatory exit exams. Included in the study are states that meet the following criteria:

- States that require students to pass, not just take, state exit exams in order to receive a high school diploma, even if the students have completed the necessary coursework with satisfactory grades
- States in which the exit exams are a state mandate rather than a local option—in other words, states that require students in all local school districts to pass exit exams, rather than allowing local districts to decide for themselves whether to make the exams a condition of graduation

We also include states that are phasing in mandatory high school exit exams that meet these two criteria. By phasing in, we mean that the state has a legislative or state board charge to have a test in place between

2006 and 2012; has already begun developing the tests; and is trying out the tests with students, although diplomas are not yet being withheld.

We have included California and Arizona, both of which withheld diplomas for the first time in 2006, as states with mandatory exit exams. As this report was going to press, major lawsuits challenging these states' exit exam requirements were awaiting action by courts, and the situation was quite fluid. Depending on how these lawsuits are resolved, the exam systems in these two states could change dramatically and suddenly.

Utah, which had adopted an exit exam requirement in 1999 and had been included in prior years' reports, changed its policy in 2006 as explained in chapter 1. Instead of withholding diplomas for the first time this year as planned, the state decided to grant diplomas to all students who met other graduation requirements even if they failed the exam, but to include a notation on the diploma saying whether the student had passed the exam. As a result of this change, Utah no longer meets our criteria for states with mandatory exit exams because it does not make the receipt of a diploma contingent on passing the exit exam. Instead, Utah has joined the category of states that offer differentiated forms of regular diplomas based on students' performance on state exams. Consequently, Utah is no longer included in this year's tallies of state survey responses that appear throughout this report, nor is it included in the state profiles at the end of this report.

This year, we added a section to chapter 1 concerning the use of high school assessments in states that do not fit our criteria for having an exit exam. These states administer high school assessments but use them for purposes other than determining whether students will graduate with a regular diploma. We include them to illustrate the range of test-based incentives that states have developed and to highlight alternatives to exit exams.

A note about terminology: This report often refers to an exit exam in the singular, but actually a state exit exam is more like an exam system, consisting of multiple tests in different subjects, such as English language arts, mathematics, science, or social studies.

Table 1

Major Characteristics of State Exit Exams

State	Current Exam	Consequences Begin/Began for Class of	Subjects Tested	Type of Test	Grade Level of Alignment	Grade Test First Administered	Prior Exit Exam or Exit Exam Being Phased Out
Alabama	Alabama High School Graduation Exam (AHSGE) 3 rd Edition	2001	Reading, language, math, science, social studies	Standards-based	11 th	11 th	Alabama High School Graduation Exam (AHSGE) 1 st and 2 nd Editions
Alaska	Alaska High School Graduation Qualifying Exam (HSGQE)	2004	Reading, writing, math	Minimum competency	8 th –10 th	10 th	None
Arizona	Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS)	2006	Reading, writing, math	Standards-based	10 th	10 th	None
California	California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE)	2006	ELA, math	Standards-based	ELA (through 10 th), math (6 th –7 th and Algebra I)	10 th	None

continues ➤

State	Current Exam	Consequences Begin/Began for Class of	Subjects Tested	Type of Test	Grade Level of Alignment	Grade Test First Administered	Prior Exit Exam or Exit Exam Being Phased Out
Florida	Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT)	2003	Reading, math	Standards-based	10 th	10 th	High School Competency Test (HSCT)
Georgia	Georgia High School Graduation Tests (GHS GT)	1994	ELA, writing, math, science, social studies	Standards-based	11 th	11 th	Basic Skills Test
Idaho	Idaho Standards Achievement Test (ISAT)	2006	Reading, language usage, math, science	Standards-based	10 th	10 th	None
Indiana	Graduation Qualifying Exam (GQE)	2000	ELA (through 9 th), math (through pre-algebra and Algebra I)	Standards-based	9 th	10 th	None
Louisiana	Graduation Exit Examination (GEE)	2003	ELA, math, science, social studies	Standards-based	9 th -12 th	10 th	Graduation Exit Exam
Maryland	Maryland High School Assessment (HSA)	2009 ¹	English II, algebra/data analysis, biology, government	End-of-course	10 th	Varies	Maryland Functional Tests
Massachusetts	Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS)	2003	ELA, math, science (2010)	Standards-based	10 th	10 th	None
Minnesota	Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments Series II (MCA-II)/ Graduation Required Assessments for Diploma (GRAD)	2010 ¹	Reading, writing, math	Minimum competency	Writing (9 th), reading (10 th), math (11 th)	Writing in 9 th ; reading in 10 th ; math in 11 th	Basic Skills Test (BST)
Mississippi	Mississippi Subject Area Testing Program (SATP)	2006 ²	English II (with writing component), Algebra I, Biology I, U.S. History from 1877	End-of-course	Aligned to course content	Varies	Functional Literacy Examination (FLE)

continues ➤

State	Current Exam	Consequences Begin/Began for Class of	Subjects Tested	Type of Test	Grade Level of Alignment	Grade Test First Administered	Prior Exit Exam or Exit Exam Being Phased Out
Nevada	High School Proficiency Examination (HSPE)	2003	Reading, writing, math, science (2008)	Standards-based	8 th -12 th	10 th	High School Proficiency Examination (earlier version based on 1994 curriculum)
New Jersey	High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA)	2003	Language arts literacy, math, science (2007)	Standards-based	11 th	11 th	High School Proficiency Test-11
New Mexico	New Mexico High School Competency Examination (NMHSCE)	1990	Reading, language arts, composition, science, social studies	Minimum competency	8 th	10 th	None
New York	Regents Examinations	2000	ELA, math, science, social studies, language other than English	End-of-course	9 th -12 th	Varies	Regents Competency Tests
North Carolina	North Carolina Competency Tests and Tests of Computer Skills	1982 (math/reading); 2001 (computer skills)	Reading comprehension, math, computer skills; and starting 2010, end-of-course exams in Algebra I, English I, U.S. history, civics and economics, biology	Standards-based; end-of-course exams (2006-07)	8 th	8 th	None
Ohio	Ohio Graduation Tests (OGT)	2007 ¹	Reading, writing, math, social studies, science	Standards-based	10 th	10 th	9 th Grade Proficiency Tests
Oklahoma	Oklahoma End-of-Instruction (EOI) Exams	2012	English II, English III, Algebra I, Algebra II, geometry, Biology I, U.S. history	End-of-course	High school standards	Varies	None
South Carolina	High School Assessment Program (HSAP)	2006 ²	ELA, math, science (2010), U.S. history (2010)	Standards-based	Through 10 th	10 th	Basic Skills Assessment Program (BSAP)

continues ➤

State	Current Exam	Consequences Begin/Began for Class of	Subjects Tested	Type of Test	Grade Level of Alignment	Grade Test First Administered	Prior Exit Exam or Exit Exam Being Phased Out
Tennessee	Gateway Examination	2005	English II, Algebra I, Biology I	End-of-course	10 th	Varies	Tennessee Competency Test
Texas	Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS)	2005	ELA (reading/writing), math, science, social studies	Standards-based	Aligned to course content	11 th	Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS)
Virginia	Standards of Learning (SOL) End-of-Course Exams	2004	English (writing/reading), Algebra I, Algebra II, geometry, biology, earth science, chemistry, world history to 1500, world history from 1500, Virginia and U.S. history, world geography	End-of-course	Aligned to course content	Varies	Literacy Passport Test
Washington	Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL)	2008	Reading, writing, math, science (2010)	Standards-based	10 th	10 th	None

Table reads: Alabama currently administers the Alabama High School Graduation Exam (AHSGE), 3rd Edition, for which consequences began for the class of 2001. The exam assesses reading, language, math, science, and social studies, and is considered by the state to be a standards-based exam aligned to 11th grade standards. The exam is first administered for graduation purposes in 11th grade. The current test replaced the Alabama High School Graduation Exam, 1st and 2nd Editions.

¹ Maryland, Minnesota, and Ohio are currently in transition to more rigorous exams. Maryland is not currently withholding diplomas, but the class of 2009 will be the first required to pass the HSA. Minnesota currently withholds diplomas based on the Basic Skills Test, and the class of 2010 will be the first required to pass the MCA-II/GRAD. Ohio currently withholds diplomas based on the 9th Grade Proficiency Test, and the class of 2007 will be the first required to pass the OGT.

² For most graduating seniors in South Carolina, 2006 was the first year that diplomas were withheld based on the HSAP; prior to 2006, students had to pass the BSAP to receive a diploma.

Note: ELA = English language arts.

Source: Center on Education Policy, exit exam survey of state departments of education, June 2006.



Chapter 1:

New Developments in High School Exit Exams

Key Findings

- In 2006, California, Arizona, and Idaho began withholding diplomas for the first time based on exit exam performance, while Utah policymakers decided not to withhold diplomas from students in the class of 2006 who failed the state's high school competency test. Oklahoma began phasing in a new exit exam. These changes bring to 22 the number of states that currently require students to pass exit exams before receiving a diploma. By 2012, a total of 25 states plan to have exit exams in place.
- In 2006, two-thirds of the nation's public high school students and three-fourths of the nation's minority public high school students attended school in the 22 states with current exit exams. By 2012, about 7 in 10 public high school students and 8 in 10 minority public high school students will attend school in the 25 states that expect to have exit exams in place.
- The remaining 25 states, which do *not* plan to withhold diplomas based on students' failure to pass an exam, have fashioned high school testing systems and policies to fulfill more limited roles in gauging high school students' competency. These other assessments are used to make graduation decisions (but not as the sole determinant), to acknowledge and differentiate achievement, and to measure college and workplace readiness.
- Lawsuits in California and Arizona have delved into fundamental questions about exit exams, such as whether students have had an opportunity to learn the material being tested, whether it's fair to hold students with disabilities and English language learners to exam requirements, and how much responsibility states have to fund preparation and remediation programs or establish alternate paths to graduation for struggling students. Courts at different levels have come down on different sides of these difficult issues. Depending on how lawsuits in California and Arizona are finally resolved, 2006 could become the year exit exams withstood legal challenges in two key states, or the year the exit exam movement was stalled in its tracks.
- States that reported changing or adding to their mature exit exam systems are generally moving toward what they see as more rigorous exams. The few states that reported on CEP's survey that they had changed passing scores on their exit exams raised the scores, not lowered them.
- Much of the opposition to and publicity about exit exams during the past year has been concentrated in states that began withholding diplomas this year or plan to do so in the next few years. Policymakers in these states have dealt with controversy in different ways. California leaders have chosen so far to hold firm and have rejected efforts to create alternate paths to a diploma for students. Policymakers in Arizona and Washington State (which plans to begin withholding diplomas in 2008) have created a variety of options for struggling students to meet graduation testing requirements. Recent opinion polls in a few key states suggest that exit exams continue to be supported by a majority of the public.

During the past year, high school exit exams faced challenges in courthouses, state houses, and school district board rooms. Courts deliberated about whether exit exams were unconstitutional or unfair. State policymakers debated whether to stick to their plans to withhold diplomas from students who failed exit exams and whether to exempt certain students or expand alternate paths to graduation. A few school districts considered defying state mandates and handing out diplomas to students who had not passed exit exams, and many school districts wrestled with whether to let these students march in commencement exercises. Meanwhile, thousands of high school seniors in California and Arizona waited nervously to see what judges and state policymakers would decide about their graduation status.

This chapter looks at several new developments in exit exam policies that emerged during 2005-06:

- Changes in the number of states with exit exam mandates, based on responses to our survey and other information
- Trends among states that do not withhold diplomas based on exit exam performance but do use high school assessments in other ways
- Legal challenges to exit exams
- Changes in key exit exam policies, based on responses to our survey
- Recent trends in both opposition to and support for exit exams

Changes in the Number of States with Mandatory Exit Exams

The number of states that have or plan to implement mandatory exit exams changed slightly during the past year, as additional states began withholding diplomas or phasing in new exit exams.

Total Number of States and Students Affected

Figure 1 displays the 22 states that currently require students to pass exams to receive a high school diploma—3 more states than in 2005 and 4 more than in 2002.

By 2012, another three states plan to withhold diplomas based on students' exam performance. Washington State's exit exam mandate takes effect for the class of 2008. Maryland stopped using the Maryland Functional Test as its exit exam in 2004, and will not resume withholding diplomas until 2009, when students will be required to pass the Maryland High School Assessment to graduate. Oklahoma adopted a new exit exam requirement in 2005 and will begin withholding diplomas for the first time for the class of 2012.

In 2006, 65% of the nation's public high school students and 76% of the nation's minority public high school students were enrolled in school in the 22 states with current exit exams (see **table 2**). By 2012, an estimated 71% of public high school students and 81% of minority public high students will be enrolled in school in the 25 states with planned exit exams.

Figure 1

States with Mandatory Exit Exams

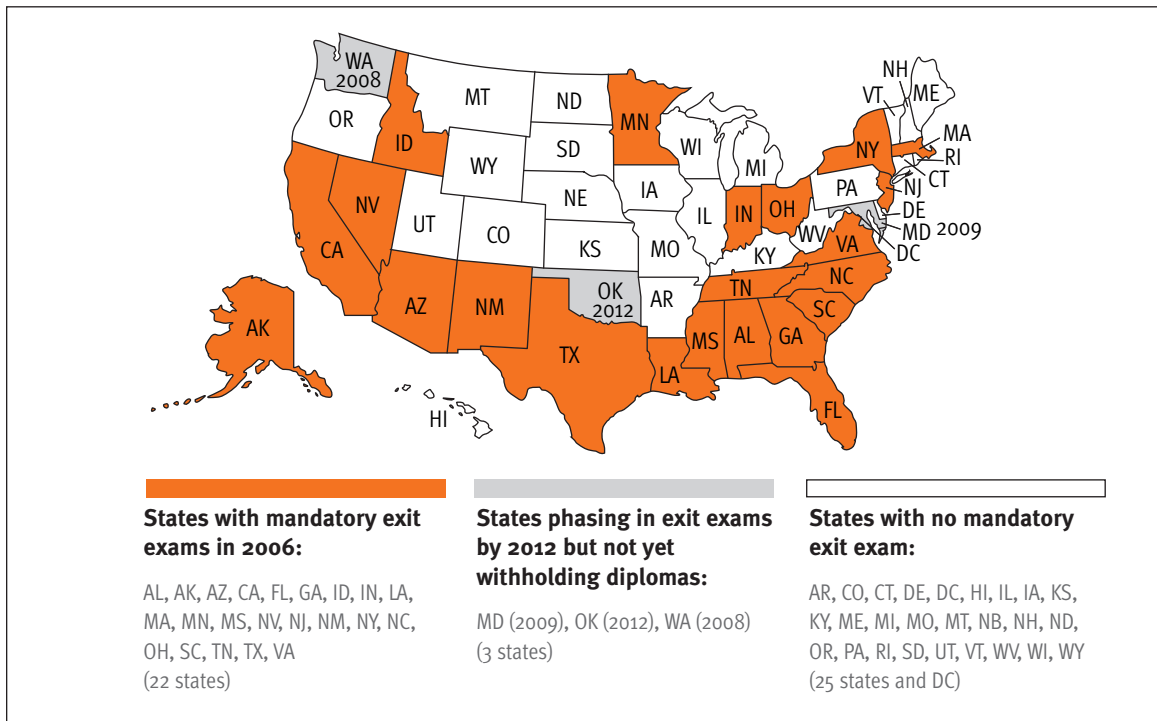


Figure reads: Alabama has a mandatory exit exam in 2006 and is withholding diplomas from students based on exam performance. Maryland is phasing in a new mandatory exit exam and plans to begin withholding diplomas based on this exam in 2009. Arkansas does not have an exit exam, nor does it plan to implement one.

Source: Center on Education Policy, exit exam survey of state departments of education, June 2006.

Table 2

Percentage of the Nation's Public High School Students Enrolled in School in States with Exit Exams, by Race/Ethnicity

Student Group	2006 (22 states)	2012 Projected (25 states)
All students	65%	71%
White	58%	63%
Latino	84%	84%
African American	72%	78%
Asian/Pacific Islander	72%	79%
American Indian/Native Alaskan	53%	76%
All minority students (Latino, African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian/Native Alaskan)	76%	81%

Table reads: In 2006, 72% of the nation's African American public school students in grades 9-12 were enrolled in school in states with exit exams; in 2012, 78% of African American public school students in grades 9-12 will be enrolled in school in states with exit exams.

Source: Calculations by the Center on Education Policy, based on data from Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, 2003.

Three States Begin Withholding Diplomas

Much of the drama surrounding exit exams during the past year has occurred in California and Arizona, two of the three states that began withholding diplomas for the first time in 2006. In Idaho, the third state to begin withholding diplomas this year, the process has been less contentious, for reasons suggested below.

California

The California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) was originally slated to become a graduation requirement for the class of 2004, but in 2003 the state board of education delayed graduation consequences until the class of 2006, giving students and teachers more time to prepare. During the past year, California's efforts to stick to its deadline for withholding diplomas have been marked by controversy and dramatic court rulings.

First the California legislature clashed with Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger over how far to go in exempting students with disabilities from the exit exam. As described in the section below on legal challenges, a lawsuit filed on behalf of these students was settled in August 2005. The settlement exempted students with disabilities in the class of 2006 from having to pass the CAHSEE, as long as they were on track to meet other graduation requirements and had taken the exam at least twice (including taking it once in their senior year, taking it at least once with appropriate accommodations, and taking it after receiving remediation). The settlement also called on the legislature and governor to adopt legislation reflecting the agreement—otherwise the case would return to court (Rosenhall, 2005; Becker, 2006).

In September 2005, the legislature passed a bill that tried to expand on the settlement by exempting students with disabilities in both the classes of 2006 and 2007 (Rosenhall, 2005). Sponsors of the bill maintained that it would give the state more time to craft a long-term solution. In October 2005, Governor Schwarzenegger vetoed that bill, saying it violated the terms of the settlement. The governor also vetoed a second bill that would have allowed school districts to develop their own alternative assessments that students could pass instead of passing the CAHSEE.

After more wrangling between the legislature and executive branch, the legislature passed a bipartisan bill early in 2006 that mirrored the conditions of the settlement, exempting students with disabilities in the class of 2006 who met the conditions described above. On January 30, the governor signed the bill (Becker, 2006).

Shortly thereafter, California became the focus of national attention with the filing of two lawsuits that sought to overturn the exit exam requirement for all students, discussed below in the section on legal challenges. On May 12, 2006, after hearing arguments in one of these cases, a state superior court judge issued a preliminary injunction that suspended the exit exam requirement for the class of 2006. Then, two weeks later, the state Supreme Court reinstated the requirement, clearing the way for diplomas to be withheld. The Supreme Court also ordered a state appeals court to take up the case this summer; as this report went to press, the case awaited a final resolution.

This process has created an emotional roller coaster for California high school seniors who have failed the exit exam. As of July 21, 2006, about 9% of the class of 2006—an estimated 40,173 students—had not yet passed both required sections of the CAHSEE after the May test administration (California Department of Education, 2006b). Of particular concern are the higher failure rates among students of color, low-income students, and—highest of all—English language learners. Almost 17% of African American students, 15% of Latino students, 14% of low-income students, and 23% of English language learners in the class of 2006 had not met the CAHSEE requirement by the end of the school year.

Supporters of the CAHSEE have countered that 9% of the seniors in the class of 2005 did not receive a diploma—before the exit exam mandate took effect—so it's not clear that many students are actually being harmed by the exit exam requirement (Asimov, 2006).

The Supreme Court ruling brought with it yet another source of anxiety for students in California—namely, whether school districts would allow seniors whose diplomas were being withheld due to exit exams to march in graduation ceremonies with their classmates. **Box 1** describes how school districts in California and Arizona handled decisions about graduation ceremonies.

Box 1

Commencement Day Dilemma: Should Seniors Who Fail Exit Exams Be Allowed to Participate in Graduation Ceremonies?

After the California Supreme Court upheld the state's exit exam requirement, individual school districts in the state were left to decide whether students who had not passed exit exams would participate in graduation ceremonies and perhaps receive a certificate of completion. Communities came down on different sides of the issue.

Students in San Jose Unified, Palo Alto Unified, and Milpitas Unified, among several other districts—were allowed to walk in their graduation ceremonies and receive certificates of completion. Los Angeles Unified allowed students to participate if they met all coursework requirements, took part in remediation their senior year, and enrolled in a summer program to prepare for summer or fall retesting. But in Sacramento City, the school board decided to forbid students from marching in the ceremony if they did not pass the CAHSEE. Among the many other districts that barred students from participating were San Jose's East Side Union and Ripon Unified.

Arizona school districts faced the same issue, and there, too, districts reached different conclusions. The Scottsdale Unified school district did not allow students who had not passed the exit exam to participate in any commencement recognition or receive any type of certificate. Students in Deer Valley Unified School District, by contrast, were allowed to walk in the commencement line with their classmates and receive a certificate of completion. This way, people attending the ceremony would not know which students were denied a regular diploma due to the exit exam.

Sources: Zaragoza, 2006; Rosenhall, 2006b; Rembulat, 2005; Mehta, 2006; and Mulloy, 2006.

Controversy also arose in California over the stance taken by State Superintendent Jack O'Connell, the state board of education, and the governor to resist any substitute tests, waivers, appeals, or other alternatives to passing the exit exam for general education students. Although the state education department staff studied various alternatives, the superintendent concluded that none would ensure that students have mastered the subjects tested by CAHSEE (O'Connell, 2006). The state board endorsed this position in March 2006 when it voted not to recommend that the legislature enact any alternatives to the exit exam (California State Board of Education, 2006). The approach supported by O'Connell, state board members, and many legislators is to expand retesting and remediation options for struggling high school seniors and for students who have completed four years of high school but have not yet passed the CAHSEE (California Department of Education, 2006a).

Arizona

Arizona's exit exam has been divisive since its inception. Twice the state edged up to the date for withholding diplomas, and twice it postponed consequences. State leaders also made other changes to exit exam policies, including revising test content and scoring and allowing report card grades to count toward exam scores. This year, the graduation testing requirement was finally due to take effect for the class of 2006, and the process has been beset by controversy and legal maneuvers.

As explained below in the legal challenges section, Arizona courts have grappled with two significant lawsuits, one that seeks to exempt English language learners from passing the exit exam and another that contends the entire exam requirement is unconstitutional. The plaintiffs in this latter case asked a superior court to suspend the exam requirement for the class of 2006, but in May 2006, their request was denied. A hearing on the issue was scheduled for July (Ryman, 2006a). In the meantime, diplomas have been withheld from seniors who failed the exit exam.

As of mid-May, about 6% of high school seniors had not yet passed all the required sections of Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS), according to the Arizona Department of Education (2006). Using the options described in chapter 5 to augment test scores with good grades, accept reciprocal scores from other states, or exempt special education students, the Department estimated that another 4% of the class would be able to meet the graduation testing requirement. So according to the state, 98% of students with the credits to graduate would receive a diploma. Still, failure rates on the exam are much higher for some groups, particularly English language learners.

The additional options available to Arizona students may partly explain why Arizona's failure rate is lower than California's. Arizona also had a somewhat longer lead-in time of administering the exam without graduation consequences.

Idaho

Without a major lawsuit, Idaho has experienced fewer problems in enforcing consequences for its exit exam than California or Arizona has. This may be partly attributable to Idaho's approach for phasing in the exam requirement. For the class of 2006, the state has set a lower passing score and will withhold diplomas only from students who do not pass the test at what state officials consider to be an 8th grade level of performance. Over the next two years, the state will raise the passing scores, so that students in the class of 2007 will be required to pass the exam at a 9th grade performance level and students in the class of 2008 at a 10th grade level.

Idaho also put its entire exam system in place in a relatively short time, using an existing test that was already familiar to students and teachers. In addition, Idaho has provided students with several alternate routes for meeting the exam requirement. The state allows students to substitute SAT or ACT scores for passing the exit exam (and has set the minimum scores required for this substitution quite low—200 in English and 460 in math on the SAT, and 17 in English and 19 in math on the ACT). Idaho has also adopted a local appeals process for students with disabilities, English language learners, and seniors who have not passed the exam, and accepts test scores from other states with standard-based exams.

The gradual increase in passing scores and the array of alternate paths may have helped to minimize opposition to the exit exam from students and parents. At the same time, some observers have criticized the state for setting expectations too low (Lowered graduation bar did students no favors, 2006).

Utah Steps Back from Withholding Diplomas

Originally, Utah had planned to start withholding diplomas in 2006 from students who had not passed the reading, math, and science portions of the Utah Basic Skills Competency Test (UBSCT). Students who met other graduation requirements but didn't pass this exit exam would have received an "alternative completion" diploma.

As of January 2006, just months before diplomas were scheduled to be withheld, 16% of seniors in the class of 2006 had not yet passed all three sections of the competency tests. Of particular concern were the very high exam failure rates in math for some subgroups of students (Olson, 2006). In addition, the state attorney general had released an opinion cautioning that students who received the alternative completion diploma may be ineligible for federal college aid.

Utah policymakers were divided about whether to deny diplomas. Some contended that giving diplomas to seniors who failed would reduce students' motivation to do better in school, while others maintained that denying diplomas would further disadvantage struggling students (Baker, 2006a). Some outside observers argued that the state had not allowed enough time or provided enough remediation funding to adequately prepare students to pass the test (Bait and switch, 2006).

After months of debate, the state board of education decided in early 2006 to back away from its exit exam requirement and grant regular diplomas to students in the class of 2006 who took the UBSCT three times but did not pass and who met all other graduation requirements. However, the state would note on the diploma whether the recipient has passed the exam. Students who passed the reading, math, and science portions of the exam would receive a diploma marked *Passed UBSCT*. Those who attempted all three sections three times but did not pass would receive a diploma marked *Did Not Pass UBSCT*. (Beginning with the class of 2008, students must also show they took advantage of their districts' remediation opportunities to get a regular diploma.) Students who did not attempt all three sections three times would receive a certificate of completion, even if they met all other graduation requirements (Utah Office of Education, 2006a). Regular diplomas marked either *Passed* and *Did Not Pass* will be accepted at the state's open enrollment and community colleges, and students with either type of diploma will still be eligible for federal college aid (Baker, 2006a).

According to the Utah Office of Education (2006b), 10% of the students in the class of 2006 had not passed all required sections of the UBSCT after the February 2006 administration. Failure rates were significantly higher for students with disabilities (60%), English language learners (38%), African American students (33%), and Latino students (33%).

As a result of the state's policy shift, Utah no longer meets CEP's definition of a state with a mandatory exit exam as outlined in the methods section of the Summary chapter. This situation could change in the future, however; some state legislators were displeased with the state board decision and may press to reinstate a requirement to withhold diplomas based on test performance for the class of 2007 or beyond (Baker, 2006b).

Oklahoma Phases in New Exit Exam Requirement

In June 2005, Oklahoma adopted a policy requiring students to pass an exit exam to graduate—too late to be included in CEP's survey for last year's high school exit exam report. This year, Oklahoma participated in our survey.

Oklahoma's end-of-instruction (EOI) exams are intended to assess students' mastery of state academic standards. Currently, Oklahoma students must take four EOI exams—in English II, Algebra I, Biology I, and U.S. history—but not as a graduation requirement. Beginning with the class of 2012, however, students will be required to pass at least four out of seven EOI exams in specified subjects (including English II and Algebra I) to receive a diploma. Exit exam test administrations will begin in school year 2008-09 with students who are 9th graders. Legislation enacted in 2006 requires the state to create three additional EOI exams in English III, Algebra II, and geometry. Some details of Oklahoma's exit exam system have yet to be determined.

Other States' Uses of High School Exams

This report focuses on the 25 states with high school exams that fit the Center's definition of an exit exam. But states throughout the country use exams in high school for a variety of reasons other than awarding diplomas. For example, all states have high school tests in math and English, and will soon have them in science, to meet the provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act. States also use high school tests for several other specialized reasons.

A Limited Role in Awarding Diplomas

Many states require districts to use a state- or district-developed exam as one factor in deciding whether students graduate from high school, but failing that test alone does not prevent a student from graduating. In Connecticut, for example, districts award diplomas based on a combination of local tests, student academic records, and state test results, but districts cannot deny a diploma solely on the basis of the state test. Delaware, Maine, and Rhode Island have similar systems in place.

Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Wyoming have slight variations on this theme. Students must pass some assessment requirements for a diploma, but there is flexibility in what these requirements are. In Pennsylvania, there is no single statewide test that students must pass; rather they must demonstrate proficiency on either the state assessments or on local assessments aligned with state standards. In Wyoming, the state diploma comes with three types of endorsements (advanced, comprehensive, general); which one a student receives depends on his or her mastery of the state's standards, but districts come up with the ways to measure proficiency. In Oregon, students in the class of 2007 and beyond will receive a regular diploma only if they demonstrate proficiency using some locally developed assessment components, most of which are portfolio-based assessments.

Several other states leave it completely up to districts whether to make assessment results a factor in awarding diplomas. For example, districts in Kentucky, New Hampshire, and Wisconsin may choose whether and how to use state assessments results in making graduation decisions. New Hampshire places just one condition on districts' decisions: namely, that the state assessment cannot be the sole factor in awarding a diploma. Districts in Kansas and Missouri can develop local assessments to use as a graduation requirement but aren't required to do so. Nebraska does not have statewide assessments, only locally developed tests, and districts have the authority to decide whether and how they are factored into awarding diplomas.

A Means of Acknowledging or Differentiating Achievement

States also use assessment results to reward achievement or convey that students are ready for the world beyond high school, without linking the tests directly to the award of a diploma. For example, Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia print test scores on student transcripts so colleges or future employers can see the results if they are interested. In a similar vein, Utah's diploma states whether a student passed a statewide exam, as explained in the preceding section, but diplomas are not withheld if the student takes the exam multiple times but fails it.

Delaware, Illinois, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Wyoming reward students who do well on state assessments by giving them diplomas with additional endorsements, certificates of distinction, or other awards. In Oregon, for example, students can receive a regular diploma plus a Certificate of Initial Mastery or a Certificate of Advanced Mastery based on several requirements including some assessment results. Oregon's system provides for a larger set of student outcomes than simply pass or fail. Delaware had planned to have a three-tiered diploma system based on a high school examination but has backed off that plan and will award traditional or distinguished diplomas for the classes of 2006 and 2007. After that, Delaware will return to a single diploma system. Illinois students may earn the Prairie State Achievement award based on scores on state exams.

Measuring College or Workplace Readiness

Five states currently require all their high school students to take the ACT or SAT. Colorado, Illinois, Kentucky, and Michigan require students to take the ACT, and Maine requires the SAT. States that require their students to take the ACT or SAT do so in hope that more students will apply to college or at least have college entrance scores ready if they already want to attend a postsecondary institution. Maine has replaced its previous high school examination with the SAT and has plans to use it to meet the high school math and English assessment requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act. However, in early June, the U.S. Department of Education rejected Maine's use of the SAT and gave the state until the end of July to convince federal officials that the SAT does measure how well students have mastered state standards (Quimby, 2006).

In Michigan and Illinois, the ACT is an important part of the high school assessment systems that these states designed to meet the adequate yearly progress requirements of NCLB. Neither state uses the ACT as the sole examination for this requirement. For example, Illinois' Prairie State Achievement Examination includes not only the ACT, but also a Harcourt-developed science test, and two WorkKeys assessments (exams designed by ACT to gauge job readiness).

College readiness has become a major theme of high school reform and of state education policy in recent years. In Colorado and Kentucky, the ACT, while a requirement, is not used for NCLB accountability, but it is intended to encourage more students to apply to college and provide additional information about college readiness to teachers and administrators.

In addition to the ACT, the 2007 Michigan Merit Examination also includes two assessments produced by ACT to measure workplace readiness (the WorkKeys assessments in Reading for Information and Applied Mathematics), along with state-designed assessments in mathematics, science, and social studies. The Michigan and Illinois examples suggest that some states are trying to find a way to preserve the important goal of assessing job readiness amid the press for postsecondary preparation.

A larger issue is whether tests such as the ACT and SAT and WorkKeys, or other measures of workplace readiness in combination, provide an integrated overall assessment of college and work readiness. While test makers currently contend that this is the case, much remains to be done to confirm these relationships. Similarly, the degree to which student performance on these tests is similar to performance on other state assessments has already led to discussions in state legislatures of how many tests are necessary, as states ponder the total assessment burden on students.

Legal Challenges to Exit Exams

The most dramatic events affecting exit exams during the past year have occurred in state and federal courtrooms in California and Arizona. In addition, a longstanding suit in Massachusetts was settled in the state's favor.

California

California courts have considered three noteworthy lawsuits during the past year related to exit exams. The first dealt specifically with the application of exit exams to students with disabilities. The other two seek to overturn the exit exam as a requirement for all students and were unresolved as of July 2006.

Exit exam requirements for students with disabilities

On August 29, 2005, a settlement was reached in *Chapman v. California*, a class action lawsuit that challenged the fairness of the CAHSEE for students with disabilities. The suit was filed in state superior court in 2002 by the nonprofit organization Disability Rights Advocates and a Bay Area law firm. The plaintiffs argued that requiring students with disabilities to pass an exam that may be beyond their abilities is discriminatory and not a valid measure of these students' capabilities, while the state contended that these students should be held to the same expectations as other pupils to ensure they receive the best possible education (Disability Rights Advocates, n.d.; Rosenhall, 2005).

As explained above, the settlement exempted students with disabilities in the class of 2006 from passing the CAHSEE as long as they met certain conditions, but the settlement could not take effect until the legislature amended state law. The bill that was finally enacted applied only to students in the class of 2006, so questions remain about whether and how the CAHSEE will affect students with disabilities in future years.

Constitutionality of exit exam requirement for all students

The most momentous legal actions in California occurred as a result of another class action lawsuit, *Valenzuela v. O'Connell*. The suit was filed on February 8, 2006, by a San Francisco law firm on behalf of students who had met other graduation requirements but had not passed the state exit exam. The suit contends that the exam unfairly penalizes students who have not received adequate learning resources. In particular, plaintiffs claim the exit exam discriminates against minority students, low-income students, and English language learners—groups that have the lowest pass rates and are also more likely to attend schools with the fewest resources (Bartindale, 2006).

On May 12, 2006, the Alameda County Superior Court suspended the exit exam requirement for this year's graduating class, on the grounds that it placed an unfair burden on poor and minority students in low-performing schools (Sanchez, 2006). Explaining his reasoning, Judge Robert Freeman wrote: "There is evidence in the record that shows that students in economically challenged communities have not had an equal opportunity to learn the materials tested on the CAHSEE, that some schools have yet to fully align their curriculum to the state's content standards, and that demonstrates that the negative effect of scarcity of resources continues to fall disproportionately on English language learners" (Superior Court, 2006). The judge's opinion further noted that only schools with high rates of failure on the CAHSEE received allocations of state remediation funds for the class of 2006, so students in many districts never received the benefit of these funds.

State Superintendent O'Connell asked the California Supreme Court to block the lower court ruling. On May 24, 2006, a divided Supreme Court lifted the injunction, restoring the graduation test requirement for the class of 2006. "At this juncture, the court is not persuaded that the relief granted by the trial court's preliminary injunction . . . would be an appropriate remedy," wrote the five justices who signed the majority opinion (State supreme court opinion reinstates exit exam, 2006). The Supreme Court declined to consider arguments against the exam but ordered a state appeals court to decide whether the exit exam should remain a requirement. In the meantime, diplomas were withheld from students who did not pass the exit exam. The appeals court held a hearing on July 25, 2006, but had not rendered a decision by the time this report went to press.

Legality of state actions in studying alternatives

Meanwhile, a second lawsuit seeking to halt the exit exam requirement was making its way through the courts. This second suit, *Californians for Justice Education Fund v. State Board of Education et al.*, alleged that the state violated its own laws by waiting until December 2005 to study alternatives to the exit exam. By that time, the suit maintained, it was too late to implement alternatives for the class of 2006. The argument hinged on a section of California law requiring the state superintendent and state board to study possible alternatives to the exit exams after the initial administrations of the test (Rosenhall, 2006a). As a remedy, the plaintiffs asked the court to block the state from withholding diplomas until the legislature could examine proposed alternatives to the test.

On May 16, 2006, Judge Freedman of the Alameda County Superior Court, the same judge who heard the Valenzuela case, dismissed the Californians for Justice lawsuit. In a defeat for opponents of the exit exam, the judge denied the plaintiffs' request, noting that the state law in question did not provide a timeline for reviewing alternatives. The judge agreed, however, that the state did not begin to consider alternatives until "very late in the process" (Kravetz, 2006).

Following this defeat, Californians for Justice filed an emergency appeal with the California Supreme Court, asking the court for a stay that would suspend the exit exam. Rather than ruling directly on the appeal, the Supreme Court sent the case to an appeals court, instructing that court to consider the emergency appeal and request for a stay (High court sends second exit exam case to appeals court, 2006). As this report went to press, the appeals court had not yet reached a decision.

Arizona

Arizona is also contending with two significant lawsuits challenging its exit exam. The first seeks to exempt English language learners from having to pass the AIMS to graduate. The second contests the exit exam requirement for all students. Both cases have been the subject of rulings during the past year, and both were still unsettled as this report went to press.

Exit exam requirement for English language learners

The first lawsuit is an outgrowth of *Flores v. Arizona*, an earlier case concerning funding and services for educating English language learners. The earlier case was first brought against the state in 1992 by the Arizona Center for Law in the Public Interest. In 2000, the plaintiffs won the case, and a court ordered Arizona to improve funding for English language learners (Bland, 2005).

In July 2005, the attorney in the original case asked a federal court to suspend the exit exam requirement for English language learners until the state complied with the earlier court order to improve instruction for these students (Sherwood, 2005). In November 2005, the plaintiffs asked the court to specifically exempt ELLs in the class of 2006 from the exam requirements. In December 2005, a district court judge agreed, ruling that ELLs could not be required to pass the exit exam until the state showed it had improved programs for these students.

But in April 2006, a U.S. Court of Appeals judge issued a stay of the district court's order to exempt the students, which meant that English language learners in the class of 2006 would have to pass the AIMS after all to receive diplomas (Zehr, 2006). About 3,000 ELLs in the class of 2006 had not yet passed AIMS as of April 2006 (Kossan & Ryman, 2006). A more definitive outcome was not expected until July 2006 at the earliest, when a three-judge panel was scheduled to hear the case.

Constitutionality of exam requirement for all students

The second, more far-reaching Arizona lawsuit, *Espinoza v. State of Arizona*, challenges the constitutionality of the state's exit exam requirement. The suit was filed on April 18, 2006, in Maricopa County Superior Court by the William E. Morris Institute for Justice, the Arizona Center for Law in the Public Interest, and a Phoenix attorney, on behalf of a group of students in the class of 2006 who have met all graduation requirements except passing the exam (Kossan & Ryman, 2006; Fischer, 2006). The plaintiffs argue that the state inadequately funds education, thereby depriving many students of the services they need to reach state academic standards and pass the AIMS. The suit mentions three specific groups of students harmed by the exit exam requirement—racial/ethnic minority students, low-income students, and English language learners—and cites statistics showing these groups have lower pass rates on the AIMS. Shortly after filing the initial suit, the same plaintiffs filed a preliminary injunction asking the court to suspend Arizona's exit exam requirement for the graduating class of 2006.

On May 15, 2006, a superior court judge denied the request to suspend the exam but scheduled a hearing for July on a preliminary injunction that could halt the graduation testing requirement until the court rules on the merits of the case (Ryman, 2006a). In his ruling, the judge said that the plaintiffs presented a "credible challenge" to Arizona's system of funding education. In explaining why he declined to suspend the exam, the judge said it would be easier to issue diplomas later if the plaintiffs prevailed than to get students to return diplomas if the court eventually upheld the exit exam. As of press time, the court had taken no further action. However, the groups initiating the lawsuit were having trouble keeping the student plaintiffs involved—one student withdrew, another moved without leaving contact information, and it was determined that a third student lacked sufficient credits to graduate, regardless of the exam requirement (Ryman, 2006b).

Massachusetts

In May 2006, Massachusetts reached a settlement with the plaintiffs in the last remaining legal challenge to the state's exit exam mandate (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2006). The settlement lets the exam stand as a graduation requirement but calls on the state to take the following steps to help students pass the exam:

- Requiring school districts to provide students who fail the exit exam with written notice of learning and retest opportunities after high school
- Taking additional steps to ensure access to the general curriculum for students with disabilities
- Developing guidance for school districts on improving instruction for English language learners
- Eliminating the requirement for students to earn a minimum score on the grade 10 exam in order to qualify for a performance appeal
- Taking specific actions to reduce dropouts

Key Issues in Legal Challenges

Recent legal challenges to exit exams have raised many of the same issues as earlier lawsuits, with some new wrinkles.

Whether the exit exam is fundamentally unfair to certain groups of students is a central issue in much of the pending litigation. Disproportionately high exam failure rates for minority and low-income students, ELLs, and students with disabilities can be damaging to perceptions about the fairness of the exams, especially if it can be shown that these students are concentrated in underfunded schools with inadequately prepared teachers. The presence or absence of options addressing the special educational and testing needs of students with disabilities and English language learners can also have a bearing on the issue of fairness.

States sometimes counter that exit exams promote equity by ensuring that all groups of students are taught a high-quality, standards-based curriculum. In California, for example, State Superintendent O'Connell has maintained that the CAHSEE has helped to focus attention on the needs of struggling students and that achievement gaps in pass rates have narrowed significantly since the exam was first administered to the class of 2006 (California Department of Education, 2006b).

Closely related to the question of fairness is the issue of "opportunity to learn," which means that it is unfair to test students on material that is not part of their curriculum or that they have not been taught. To determine whether students have had an adequate opportunity to learn the material being tested, courts look at such factors as whether the curriculum and classroom instruction are well aligned with the state's content standards and tests; whether states are providing appropriate instruction, remediation, qualified teachers, and other fundamental elements of education; and how much time students have been given to prepare for the exam requirement.

In the recent crop of lawsuits, the extent of state-supported remediation and prevention services has emerged as an important issue, along with the availability of alternate paths to a diploma for struggling students.

In previous cases, courts have generally shown reluctance to overturn exit exam requirements. More often, they have instructed states to provide additional remediation and preparation opportunities, develop special procedures for students with disabilities or English language learners, or provide students with sufficient notice of the exam requirement. Since graduation ceremonies have concluded for this year, a reversal of the California Supreme Court decision seems doubtful for the class of 2006, though by no means impossible.

In light of the high stakes of failure for students, pending cases are likely to be taken to the highest levels of their respective state court systems. If the courts side with the plaintiffs, it would not only overturn the exit exam requirement in California or Arizona but could also have a chilling effect in other states, particularly ones that are considering a new exit exam or have not fully phased in a planned exit exam requirement.

Whether the plaintiffs in these cases win or lose, the events in these two states may encourage other states to adjust their policies to try to avoid lawsuits in the future—for example, by increasing remediation opportunities.

Other Noteworthy Changes in State Exit Exam Policies

Our survey asked states whether they had made major changes during the past year in their exit exam policies and whether they had changed their exit exam cut scores during the past 18 months. As discussed below, five states reported switching to different tests or adding new tests to their exit exam system. Five other states reported adopting new test standards for their exit exams or changing passing scores. Several states also reported adding to or revising their alternate paths to a diploma; those changes are described in chapter 5.

States Changing or Adding Tests

The past year marked a period of transition from old to new exit exams for South Carolina, Mississippi, Maryland, Minnesota, and Ohio. Generally, states reported that these shifts involved moving from a less rigorous exam to a more rigorous one. In addition, North Carolina decided during the past year to expand its exit exam requirements to include end-of-course tests, on top of its existing standards-based tests.

South Carolina and Mississippi fully implement new tests

This year, South Carolina finished phasing in a new standards-based exit exam, the High School Assessment Program (HSAP), which the state views as more rigorous than the minimum competency exit exam it replaced. The state first administered the HSAP to meet the accountability requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2003, and began phasing it in as an exit exam in 2004. For most graduating seniors, 2006 was the first year that diplomas have been withheld based on the HSAP. (Some students who completed their high school coursework early were subject to the HSAP as a graduation requirement before 2006.)

Since South Carolina students were already accustomed to an exit exam requirement, the process of withholding diplomas based on the new exam did not generate the controversy that arose in states with no previous exit exam.

Beginning with the class of 2010, South Carolina plans to add a requirement for students to pass end-of-course exams in science and history, in addition to the current exams in English language arts and math.

In Mississippi, the class of 2006 was the first required to pass all four of the state's Subject Area Testing Program (SATP) exams. The SATP end-of-course exams replaced Mississippi's former minimum competency exit exam. Each year since 2003, Mississippi has added a SATP testing requirement in a new subject. The addition of algebra, the fourth mandated subject text, in 2006 marked the end of the SATP phase-in.

Other states in transition from old to new exams

Maryland, Minnesota, and Ohio are in the midst of transition to more rigorous exams. Maryland stopped using its former minimum competency exit exam in 2004, and is not withholding diplomas while it phases in a series of end-of-course exams. The state will begin withholding diplomas again when the class of 2009 must pass the end-of-course exams.

In Minnesota, the Graduation Required Assessments for Diploma (GRAD) will gradually replace the current Basic Skills Tests (BSTs) as the state's exit exam. Although the state considers both exams to be minimum competency tests, the BSTs are aligned to 8th grade standards in reading and math and 10th grade standards in writing, while the new GRAD tests are aligned to standards for grades 9-11, depending on the subject. Minnesota currently withholds diplomas based on the BSTs. The class of 2010 will be the first required to pass the GRAD tests for graduation.

Ohio currently uses its 9th Grade Proficiency Test as its exit exam but is preparing to shift to the Ohio Graduation Tests (OGT), which are aligned to 10th grade standards. The class of 2007 will be the first class required to pass the OGT.

North Carolina's new end-of-course tests

For several years, North Carolina has required students to pass a set of standards-based competency exams to receive a diploma. In 2006-07, the state will introduce a requirement for students in the college/university preparation, college/technical preparation, and career preparation courses of study to pass five end-of-course exams to graduate. Students entering 9th grade this upcoming school year will be required to pass end-of-course exams in English I, Algebra I, biology, U.S. history, and civics and economics, in addition to the current competency tests in reading, math, and computer skills.

States Aligning Exams to New Standards or Raising Passing Scores

When states adopt new standards for curriculum content, they must realign their exit exams to the new content standards and set new passing scores. This process does not automatically make the test easier or harder—it depends on how the standards have changed and where the scores are set.

Georgia officials reported on our survey that the state is making the transition to new state curriculum standards. The specifications and content for the state's graduation tests in language arts and science have been revised to align with both the old and new standards starting in spring 2006. In 2008, the state will implement graduation tests in these subjects that are aligned solely to the new curriculum standards. Virginia has already been through the realignment process for some of its end-of-course exit exams. In 2005, the state implemented end-of-course exams in reading and Algebra II that had been redesigned to reflect revised state content standards. New passing scores were also set based on the new content standards.

Three additional states—New York, Texas, and Nevada—reported in our survey that during the past 18 months they have raised the passing scores for their exit exams or will soon raise them, independent of any changes in curriculum standards.

- In October 2005, the New York Board of Regents approved a plan to phase in higher passing scores for the five Regents Exams required for graduation. General education students who enter 9th grade in 2008 need a score of 65 or over to pass each of the five tests, instead of the current passing score of 55.
- In spring 2005, Texas increased the passing scores for its exit exam to the level recommended by a state panel.
- Nevada has restored the passing score for its math exam to the level originally recommended by the state board of education, after reducing it in 2003 at the request of the legislature.

The shift to higher passing scores represents a departure from past years, when changing passing scores sometimes meant lowering them. In our 2005 report, for example, we noted that Washington, Arizona, and Tennessee lowered their passing scores.

Public Opposition and Support

During the past year, active opposition to exit exams persisted in California, which began withholding diplomas this year, and in Washington State, which plans to begin withholding diplomas in 2008. Even in these states, however, recent public opinion polls suggest that the majority of citizens support exit exams. A smaller-scale rebellion against exit exams flared up in Massachusetts, which had weathered controversy in past years. States responded to opposition in different ways.

California

In California, grassroots groups helped students and other critics of the CAHSEE organize protests throughout the state. Some of the criticism came from local educators and policymakers. In late May, after the California Supreme Court had reinstated the exit exam, the school board of the Oakland Unified School District voted to defy state law and award diplomas to students who had failed the CAHSEE. But the bankrupt district is in state receivership, which limits the school board's authority, and the state administrator charged with overseeing the school system refused to carry out the board vote (Garcia, 2006).

Still, most Californians favor the exit exam requirement, according to a statewide poll by the Public Policy Institute of California (2006), a nonprofit group that periodically surveys Californians on policy issues. In this poll, 73% of Californians and 75% of public school parents in the state said they thought students should have to pass a statewide test to graduate from high school. Support is even higher among citizens with an interest in business: 85% of readers responding to a weekly poll of the journal *Los Angeles Business* supported the exit exam requirement (Poll: High school exit exam should be a requirement, 2006). As we have reported in past years, the business community has traditionally been a strong advocate for exit exams, sometimes playing a key role in getting exit exam requirements enacted. This level of citizen support for exit exams may have encouraged California policymakers to hold firm on their exam policies in the face of opposition.

Washington State

The fate of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL), the state's exit exam, became a major political issue during the 2006 legislative session, with powerful state leaders lined up on both sides of the debate. As of June 2006, 86% of the state's sophomores had passed the reading portion of the exam, and 84% had passed the writing portion, but only 54% had passed the math portion (Gewertz, 2006). Students must pass all three sections to graduate. While the state superintendent emphasized that these results represented progress over the 2005 scores, low pass rates have reignited debate about how to address the failure rates and whether to retain the graduation test requirement.

Teachers' unions, parent organizations, and some school districts pushed to eliminate the exit exam as a sole graduation requirement, while the governor, state superintendent, and business leaders urged legislators to maintain it (Bach & Blanchard, 2006). In testimony before the state legislature, the president of the Washington Education Association said that 72% of the association's members believe the WASL should not be the sole way of measuring whether students have met the state's standards (Washington Education Association, 2006).

The public in Washington views the exit exam more favorably than teachers do, according to two polls by the nonprofit Partnership for Learning. In a November 2005 statewide poll, 64% of state residents said they supported the requirement for students to pass the WASL to graduate (Davis, Hibbitts & Midghall, 2006a). A June 2006 poll posed a similar question to the state's African American and Latino residents and found that 62% of African American and 72% of Latino citizens polled expressed support for the exit exam requirement (Davis, Hibbitts & Midghall, 2006b). This level of support among minority citizens is interesting because lawsuits challenging exit exams often emphasize their negative effects for minority students.

The debate in Washington State was quelled somewhat in early 2006, when the legislature and governor agreed on a compromise bill that maintained the exit exam requirement and kept the current passing scores. A key element of the compromise was the expansion of alternate paths to a diploma for students who fail the exam at least twice. This legislation brought to fruition a two-year process of developing alternate paths.

Under one alternate path for demonstrating student achievement, students and teachers carefully compile a collection of classroom work that is scored off-site by trained experts using detailed scoring guides. Other alternate paths include substituting scores on the SAT, ACT, or PSAT tests for below-passing scores on the exit exam in math only, and submitting course grades in a particular subject that are comparable to the grades of students who passed the exit exam in that subject. Students with disabilities may take an alternate assessment, but those who do receive a certificate of individual achievement rather than a diploma.

The compromise legislation also instructed the state education department to develop guidelines and appeal procedures for students who transfer from out of state, students with special cases, and students who contend their assessments were scored incorrectly. Moreover, policymakers agreed to remove assessment scores from student transcripts. Finally, the legislature ordered a two-year study of why students fail and what other alternate paths to graduation might be added later (Bach, 2006).

As described in chapter 5, other states in addition to Washington have sought to build support for exit exams by expanding alternate paths to a diploma.

Other Indicators of Opposition and Support

Opposition to exit exams has not totally disappeared in other states over the past year. A local rebellion against the state exit exam arose in 2006 in Massachusetts—which has been withholding diplomas since 2003. The mayor and the school committee in New Bedford, Massachusetts, sought to issue diplomas in May to 52 seniors who had met other graduation requirements but failed the exam. The mayor noted that the New Bedford school district has a high dropout rate and lacks sufficient funding for remedial classes for all students who need them. But after the district superintendent refused to sign the replacement diplomas and the governor threatened to withhold state funding from the district, the mayor backed down (NBC-10, 2006). As we described in our previous years' reports, Cambridge and other Massachusetts districts had threatened to award diplomas to students who had failed the exam, and the outcome was similar.

By the same token, many citizens in other states support exit exams, according to opinion polls. As part of a national poll on high school reform released in fall 2005, the Educational Testing Service surveyed citizens in Ohio about that state's exit exam. The poll revealed that 75% of Ohioans favored requiring students to pass a statewide test before they could receive a diploma (ETS, 2005).

Conclusion

Most of the activity surrounding exit exams during the past year has occurred in states that have started to withhold diplomas or are poised to do so within a few years. Based on CEP's five years of monitoring state exit exams, we see a general trend of controversy, lawsuits, and policy debate in the early years of an exit exam, up through the time consequences are attached for students.

The extent of opposition and the seriousness of the legal challenges depend on several factors. One notable factor seems to be the degree of diversity in the state—whether the state enrolls large numbers of English language learners and minority students, as California and Arizona do. Other influential factors appear to be the state's willingness to provide funding for remediation, its readiness to allow alternate paths to a diploma, the lead-in time before diplomas are withheld, the difficulty of its test, the ambitiousness of its

passing scores, the general political climate, the state's history of test-based accountability, and its degree of local school district independence.

State policymakers respond to this period of growing pains in different ways. Some, like California and Massachusetts, hold relatively steadfast and expect dissent to lessen over time. Others, like Arizona and Washington, adopt an array of alternate paths. Some states lower passing scores, as Nevada and others have done in past years. These changes meet with varying degrees of success, and some changes may open up a state to criticisms that it has watered down its exam requirements too much.


Once the exam consequences are in place for a year or two, the climate seems to settle down. Court cases tend to be resolved in ways that retain the basic requirement, perhaps because the burden of proof for the plaintiffs is high. It is too early to say why controversy and policy changes diminish. Maybe the exam becomes an accepted part of education in the state. Maybe schools change their curriculum and instruction to better prepare students, and students take the tests more seriously. Or maybe the students who fail the exams—typically not a vocal constituency—drop out, disappear, and are no longer a focus of public concern. Greater attention to curriculum, achievement, pass rates, and graduation rates is needed to determine whether exit exams in the mature phase are less contentious because they are working as intended or for other reasons. These issues are discussed in chapter 3.

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Chapter 2:

Special Focus— State Efforts to Help Students Pass Exit Exams

Key Findings

- States provide remediation and other support programs to raise student achievement, avoid public opposition due to low pass rates, head off lawsuits, and meet the requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act.
- According to our survey of state education officials, 18 of the 25 states with current or planned exit exams require their school districts to offer remediation courses for students who do not pass portions of their exit exams. But only six states actually require these students to attend the remediation courses.
- Almost all states use means in addition to remediation to help students, such as publishing study guides, releasing past test items, providing professional development for teachers, and conducting outreach programs to inform parents of the importance of the exams.
- Of the 25 states with exit exams, 14 fund programs to help students pass exit exams. There is a wide range in spending, but it is difficult to compare across states.
- There is evidence that remediation is effective in raising students' exit exam scores. States are still investigating what types of remediation programs are most beneficial. Some factors that affect the success of remediation programs are student motivation and attendance, scheduling, funding, and administration.

Most states with exit exams have found it necessary to institute programs aimed at helping students pass the tests, through remediation classes, publication of study guides, release of sample questions, and other methods. Some states are spending substantial amounts of money on these programs, others are not. Three states with new or approaching exit exam requirements—California and Arizona this year and Washington in 2008—seem to be spending the most. Between the time the law creating the exit exam was passed and the first year the exam counted (or will count) as a graduation requirement, these three states have had to find extra funds to help more students pass, making the exams more costly than perhaps was expected.

In this year's report on high school exit exams, CEP has chosen to focus on state efforts to get all students to pass exit exams. The first section of this chapter explains why such programs are necessary. The next section focuses on costs and types of student support. We then discuss recent research from a few states on the effectiveness of remediation programs. Finally, we describe student support efforts in more detail in four selected states.

Why States Are Providing More Student Support

Aside from the obvious reason that state policymakers want higher levels of student achievement, there are three more immediate reasons why states, particularly those just instituting exit exams as a graduation requirement, fund remediation and other student support programs: to avoid the political embarrassment of low pass rates on the exams, to avoid lawsuits, and to meet the requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

Low Pass Rates Create Political Problems

In a broad sense, states are providing more student support because they want high pass rates without watering down academic standards or the content of an exam. Policymakers are under simultaneous pressure to have both rigorous standards and test content, and to avoid political problems that arise when large numbers of students do not pass exit exams. The most educationally sound way to address this dilemma is to provide adequate preparation and remediation services to students who are at risk of not passing by the time they are due to graduate.

In states with exit exams, business groups in particular have pushed for high standards and rigorous assessments, as they have an obvious interest in ensuring that entry-level employees have basic skills. Many state-level political leaders want to improve student performance to respond to the needs of business groups and to assuage broader public doubts about the quality of public education. A state's reputation for high standards and rigorous schooling is seen as a means of attracting employers. For example, Washington State's superintendent of education recently defended a series of reforms in that state's education system, including exit exams, as a means of addressing the competitive pressures of globalization (Bergeson, 2005).

Low pass rates create political problems which policymakers seek to avoid. In California, Washington, and Arizona—all states with fairly new exit exam programs—low initial pass rates have stirred up public opposition to the tests, which in turn has weakened legislative support, particularly in Arizona.

Avoiding Lawsuits

Another important factor that drives student support policies is the threat of lawsuits, particularly those that aim to suspend or end testing programs because they are discriminatory in intent or effect. Courts have tended to dismiss claims of intentional discrimination in high-stakes testing cases because they usually do not find evidence that policymakers adopted a testing program because it would have a negative impact on a certain group of students, or that a testing program would perpetuate the effects of past discrimination. Courts have accepted the arguments of states that exit exams are necessary to measure students' educational performance and to meet state education objectives, even if diplomas are withheld from students who do not pass. The 1981 *Debra P. v. Turlington* case was the landmark decision in this area; plaintiffs argued that the exam was instituted before Florida had fully overcome the effects of legally mandated segregation. Florida's exit exam was upheld even though large numbers of minority students did not pass and were taking remediation courses (National Research Council, 1999).

Other lawsuits have been filed because high-stakes exams are alleged to have a discriminatory effect, even if it is not intentional. In such cases, plaintiffs must show that the test has a disparate impact on a certain group, meaning the failure rate for that group is higher than the failure rate of the pool of test-takers as a whole. However, a long string of court cases has established that even if such an impact is shown, testing programs have still passed legal muster when test administrators and policymakers show that testing advances important educational objectives; that the test is related to those objectives; and that the test meets professional standards of validity, reliability and fairness.¹

¹ For an analysis of relevant court cases, see NRC (1999), pp. 50-62.

Nonetheless, even if tests are not discriminatory, it is sometimes a political embarrassment when large percentages of minority students fail exit exams, which raises issues of fairness in the public eye. States see student support services and remediation as helpful in countering this sentiment.

Due process is one area where aspects of testing programs have been successfully challenged. This occurs in cases where students did not receive sufficient advance notice of exit exam requirements, and where they did not have the opportunity to learn the material being tested. Court decisions in this area partly explain the long lag time between passage of legislation creating an exit exam and the year when the requirement actually takes effect. *Debra P. v. Turlington* established a standard of providing at least four years' notice to students and parents that passing an exam will soon be a requirement for graduation, and giving students and parents a clear indication of test content and performance expectations. Debra P. also helped institutionalize the concept of opportunity to learn. States are most likely to avoid or prevail in such lawsuits if they ensure that tests are aligned with what is actually taught and if they are providing opportunity to learn—that is, appropriate instruction, remediation, qualified teachers, and a curriculum aligned with standards and assessments.

Recent court cases in California and Arizona, discussed in chapter 1, have challenged testing programs in those states at least partly on the grounds of opportunity to learn.

Requirements of No Child Left Behind

The No Child Left Behind Act does not require students to pass an exam to graduate from high school, but it does require testing annually in grades 3-8 and once in high school. As described in chapter 4, our survey indicates that most state exit exams are also used as the high school test for NCLB purposes, although for many states, the passing score to receive a high school diploma is lower than the “proficient” level demanded by NCLB. Nonetheless, NCLB still provides a strong incentive for states to find ways to improve students' performance on exit exams. For high schools that receive federal Title I funds in particular, high failure rates mean that these schools are less likely to make adequate yearly progress as defined by NCLB and more likely to subsequently enter the law's improvement status. Districts must offer school choice and tutoring services and might be required to reorganize schools, or be reorganized themselves. One way to improve test performance and avoid these sanctions is through student support programs.

What States Are Doing to Help Students Pass Exit Exams

As shown in **table 3**, 18 of the 25 states with current or planned exit exams reported on our survey that they require their school districts to offer remediation courses for students who do not pass portions of their exit exams. But only six states said they actually require these students to attend the remediation courses. Furthermore, almost all states use means in addition to remediation to help students, such as publishing study guides, releasing past test items, providing professional development for teachers, and conducting outreach programs to inform parents of the importance of the exams.

An additional four states (Arizona, Georgia, Massachusetts, and Mississippi) indicated that while remediation is not a legal requirement, it is still expected that districts or schools provide these services.

Five states (Arizona, California, Indiana, Louisiana, and Massachusetts) require remediation only for students who wish to pursue an appeals process or waiver of their exam requirement, and/or to qualify for alternate routes to a diploma. Twelve states do not require mandatory participation in remediation programs for students who fail exit exams, but some districts in some of these states may have such a requirement.

Table 3

State Policies Requiring Remediation

Student support policy	States	Total
State requires districts to offer remediation	AL, CA, FL, IN, LA, MD, MN, NV, NJ, NY, NC, OH, OK, SC, TN, TX, VA, WA	18
State requires students to participate in remediation	FL, MD, NC, OH, OK, SC	6

Table reads: Six states require students who have not passed exit exams to participate in remediation courses.

Source: Center on Education Policy, exit exam survey of state education officials, June 2006, items 26 & 27.

Table 4

Additional State Support Policies for Helping Students Pass Exit Exams

Policy	States	Total
Provides professional development for teachers	AL, AK, AZ, CA, FL, ID, IN, LA, MD, MA, MN, MS, NJ, NM, NY, NC, OH, OK, SC, TN, TX, VA, WA	23
Provides preparation materials to students	AK, AZ, CA, FL, GA, ID, IN, LA, MD, MA, MN, MS, NV, NJ, NC, OH, OK, SC, TN, TX, VA, WA	22
Releases test items	AZ, CA, FL, GA, IN, LA, MD, MA, MN, NV, NJ, NY, NC, OH, OK, SC, TX, VA, WA	19

Table reads: Twenty-two states provide exit exam preparation materials to students.

Source: Center on Education Policy, exit exam survey of state education officials, June 2006, items 24, 25, & 29.

The actual administration of student support programs takes place at the district level. The role of state education agencies is to provide funds, set general policies, develop study guides, offer professional development opportunities for teachers, and examine best practices. Remediation takes place in a variety of forms—special instruction during school, after-school, Saturdays, and during the summer.

In addition to requiring remediation, most states with exit exams offer other supports to help students pass the exams. Nearly all (23 states) provide professional development to prepare teachers to teach the material on exit exams, 22 states provide preparation materials to students, and 19 release test items. **Table 4** summarizes state survey responses about these other supports.

Preparation materials include a variety of study guides for students to help them pass exit exams. These take the form of sample questions and tests, study guides, and other tutorials available online. States also distribute study guides in print form or on CD-ROM.

Past test items are usually released online. Releasing past test items or entire tests can be expensive and time-consuming, because once test items are made public, new test items have to be developed to replace them. Item development is usually done by employees of the state's testing contractor, who must write the questions, have them reviewed internally and externally, and then field-test them. Given these constraints, only seven states release entire tests (Florida, Indiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, Ohio, Texas). Some states that do not release tests or test items nonetheless make sample questions available, but these are not questions that have been used in past administrations of the test.

Bowing to pressure from parents' groups, Florida recently made entire 2005 FCAT exams available online. It took some time to be able to do this, because the state had to wait for enough extra test questions to be developed for the 2006 exam to replace the items made public. This will cost the state an extra \$3 million annually, because each FCAT test item costs about \$2,000 to develop. In addition to being concerned about the costs, state officials are also concerned that some students will use the released FCAT as their sole study guide for the following year's test.

States do not return graded test booklets to students, so generally speaking, students cannot see precisely which items they did not answer correctly or why. This is partly because of the large costs and administrative burden that returning corrected exams would entail, such as having state personnel field calls from parents concerned with the scoring of their child's test.

Some states do allow parents to see their child's corrected test under certain conditions. For example, in Washington, a policy change was made this year to allow students to see their graded WASL test booklet, as demanded by some parents' groups. However, response to the policy change has not been overwhelming. Media reports indicate that while there are a fair number of inquiries to view graded test booklets, few parents actually follow through. Of three Olympia-area school districts, only one received requests from parents to view booklets. The district received four requests, and three parents followed through. This is probably because the administrative hurdles for viewing the booklets are rather high, in order to protect the content of the tests. (Washington releases selected items but not the entire test.) Parents must go to the local school district administration building to view the test booklet, they cannot copy or photograph it, and they must sign a form promising not to reveal test items.

Costs

Of the 25 states with exit exams, 14 fund programs for student support to pass exit exams. There is a wide range in spending, but it is difficult to compare how much states spend on student support programs specifically for exit exams. CEP's 2004 report, *Pay Now or Pay Later: The Hidden Costs of Exit Exams*, found that the actual cost of exit exams, including remediation, goes beyond what is evident from examining line items in budgets, and costs are also shouldered at the district level. Comparisons are also difficult because of differences among states in size, demographics, pass rates, test difficulty, cost of living, and ways of funding education.

The range of spending is wide. California spent \$20 million on remediation in 2005-06. Governor Schwarzenegger signed an education budget bill that almost tripled this figure to \$57.5 million for 2006-07 (Jacobson, 2005). Washington State expects to spend \$28.6 million on remediation in 2006-07. For the four other states able to report this figure, the amount ranged from about \$2 million to \$10 million.

In other states, spending for student support for passing exit exams is subsumed under spending for broader remedial purposes, such as programs to help students at all grade levels pass various types of assessments, and anti-dropout programs. For Florida, this figure is just over \$650 million; in Texas it is \$1.1 billion; and in South Carolina it is \$120 million.

Some of this large-scale spending on remediation may only be temporary. Some observers have noted a tendency for states to spend a lot of money on remediation when the exit exam first counts as a graduation requirement, and then for funding to drop off as the test becomes a more routine part of the educational landscape and as curriculum, tests, and standards become better aligned. At the school and district level, remediation may shift to more conventional classroom-based preparation for the exit exam. As we noted, California, Washington, and Arizona—states with new or approaching exam mandates—are the big spenders on remediation this year. In states where the exam is more established, like Massachusetts and Indiana, funding for remediation decreased after the first few years the testing requirement took effect (Hoff, 2006).

These figures do not take into account money that may be spent privately, by parents who turn to private tutoring or test preparation companies to help their children pass exit exams. There is no way to estimate this. However, it is clear that the private sector does see opportunity in helping students pass exit exams. For example, a computer search for “FCAT,” Florida’s state exit exam, turned up the Florida state department of education Web site, along with a large number of private companies offering FCAT test preparation courses; some offer these to schools and districts, others to parents. This should be viewed in the context of the striking overall growth of the test preparation industry in general. A recent *Wall Street Journal* editorial noted that Americans now spend \$4 billion on test preparation, and that schools spent \$879 million on test preparation services in 2004-05, a 25% increase from the previous year (Gurdon, 2006).

Does Remediation Work?

Evidence suggests that remediation is effective in raising students’ exit exam scores, although states are still investigating what types of remediation programs are most beneficial. Some factors that affect the success of remediation programs are student motivation and attendance, scheduling, funding, and administration.

Three states—Indiana, Massachusetts, and California—have been the subject of recent evaluations of remediation efforts. California’s study of remediation is part of an annual independent review of the CAHSEE required by the legislation creating the exit exam (HumRRO, 2005). Indiana’s study was commissioned by the state when the Graduation Qualifying Exam (GQE) became a requirement for graduation (CTB/McGraw Hill, 2000). The study of remediation programs in Massachusetts was done by an education watchdog group, Mass Insight Education and Research Institute, with support from foundations. In addition to these evaluation studies, remediation programs were one topic of CEP’s 2005 report on its focus group study of exit exams in Maryland and Virginia, *How Have High School Exit Exams Changed Our Schools?* (CEP, 2005). Some common findings that emerged from these studies are summarized in this section. They are described in more detail in the following section on remediation programs in four states.

Remediation Programs Are Effective in Improving Pass Rates

All three evaluations of state remediation programs, in Massachusetts, Indiana and California, had varying types and degrees of evidence to indicate that remediation programs are effective. Students who participate in remediation sessions do better on their second attempt at passing the exit exam than students who do not participate. A quite striking effect was found in Worcester, Massachusetts, which was presented as having a model remediation program. Students in that city’s remediation programs had second-try pass rates that were double those of students who did not attend the programs.

Indiana’s study found more modest effects. The authors concluded that a variety of factors lead to higher scores on students’ second attempts at passing an exit exam. Students are a year older and have had an additional year of schooling, and may be more motivated to pass in the 11th grade as graduation looms. In short, remediation is one factor among several that leads to increasing student scores over multiple tries.

Student Motivation and Attendance Are Key Factors

A major issue for educators and policymakers is getting eligible students to attend remediation sessions. All of the state evaluations and CEP’s focus group study addressed this issue in different ways. In the California study, teachers and administrators said that major barriers to the effectiveness of remediation are low student motivation, attendance problems, and lack of parental involvement; the same was true in Indiana.

The Massachusetts study interviewed students at risk of failing exit exams and found a number of factors that both motivated students and demotivated them. Students certainly wanted to pass the exams and get their diploma; they also said the exit exams were making them study harder. But they were resentful toward exit exams as a graduation requirement and sometimes received mixed messages about them from teachers and parents. Another demotivating factor was a low initial score. Students who fared very poorly on their first try on the exam were less likely to attend remediation sessions, compared with other students who also did not pass but whose scores were closer to the passing level.

In addition, some California teachers felt that remediation courses may simply not be enough to address the challenges often faced by students who come from families of migrant workers, recent immigrants with little previous education, students in foster care, and other students whose family situations have a negative impact on their attendance or school performance.

Regular School Day Remediation Sessions Seem to Work Best

All of the state evaluations and CEP's focus group study contained evidence to suggest that holding remediation sessions during regular school hours seems preferable to afternoon and weekend sessions, and that giving students course credit may also help. This is because of reduced conflict with student work schedules, sports, or other activities. The states we examined in detail in the next section have all gravitated toward remediation sessions during regular school hours, although media reports seem to highlight after-school, weekend, and summer sessions. One school administrator told CEP that after-school sessions were "public relations"; they sound good to the public but attendance is better at sessions held during school hours.

Funding and Administration Make a Difference

A review of the state studies and media reports on remediation suggests that adequate funding of remediation programs is important. Last year, California funded its first mass remediation program specifically for the CAHSEE only to find that it was not enough to meet the need. The money only went to schools in which at least 28% of students did not pass the exit exam initially. But schools with smaller percentages of students failing the exams did not get these funds, and their students were underserved. California has now greatly increased funding for remediation. In Massachusetts, funding for remediation has been restricted only to juniors and seniors who have not passed the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS); freshmen and sophomores were previously eligible. However, critics of recent budget cuts for remediation argue that some younger students need remediation before they take the MCAS—in particular, many immigrant students and those moving from other states.

Some states have experienced administrative problems with remediation—namely, a lack of communication and coordination between the state and district levels when the time came to institute new remediation programs. In Arizona, a large amount of state remediation funds went unused because of problems districts had in accessing funds; in the end, very few eligible students were served. When Indiana's remediation program started, many educators at the school level were unaware of the program or how to go about obtaining study materials produced by the state.

Research has just begun to examine which types of administrative arrangements work best for remediation sessions and which forms it should take (see **Box 2**); obviously the optimal way to administer remediation will vary from state to state. Mass Insight found a highly centralized administrative approach used in Worcester to be a model.

Research has been limited on the types of remediation that work best, but some states are taking the lead in trying to find out. Are sessions during the school day better than those held after-school or on weekends? Is it better to tutor students individually, or are small classes better? How intense should the pace of the remedial courses be?

While states fund remediation efforts, set guidelines, and produce study aids, the actual work of administering remediation sessions is done at the district level. Media reports indicate that approaches for administering these sessions vary widely:

- In the Clover Park School District in Tacoma, Washington, sophomores at risk of not passing the WASL participate in an intensive 10-week, after-school reading and math program. These students spend 10 extra hours a week at school. In nearby Seattle, sophomores who failed the WASL this spring could sign up for a five-week Summer College. The sessions were scheduled to be held at college campuses, and along with mathematics and English, students could take an elective college course. The idea was to simultaneously help students pass the exam who had narrowly missed passing before, and to get these students to aspire to college (Perry, 2006; Manthey & Abe, 2006).
- The Tucson, Arizona school district plans to invite seniors who do not pass AIMS in 2006 to attend summer classes, and even come back for a fifth year of high school, which might combine test preparation, internships, and/or attendance at community colleges (Bustamante, 2005).
- In Long Beach, California, seniors who are in danger of not passing the CAHSEE take a preparatory course instead of an English elective. Those not passing math take a math preparatory course in addition to their required algebra course. There are also voluntary after-school, Saturday, and summer classes. Teachers identify students in need of help by administering mock CAHSEE tests to 9th graders (Butler, 2005).
- One high school in San Benito, California, *requires* students who have not passed the CAHSEE to take summer classes in the areas they failed. In addition, they must use a school period that was previously free for remediation class (Exit exams are real in '06, *Hollister Free Lance*, 2005).

Although these diverse forms of remediation are perhaps a reflection of the large number of self-governed school districts in the U.S., they also suggest that a “scattershot” approach is being taken in many places; districts and schools are trying a variety of forms of remediation and seeking to discover what works best. CEP’s 2005 report on exit exams in Maryland and Virginia found that districts often created their own remediation sessions based on what they thought would work. Teachers sometimes even developed their own study guides, but they had little information on what worked best in other schools or districts.

Because so little research has been conducted on which forms of remediation work best, more states are making efforts to monitor the effectiveness of their remediation programs through occasional independent analyses and information-sharing. For example, Washington’s new remediation program, Promoting Academic Success, will deliver \$28 million to districts for remedial programs. Districts can spend the money on a remediation program of their own design (after-school, summer school, individualized tutoring, etc.), but one condition of receiving state funds is that districts must report student scores and other data back to the state. The state will analyze the data to determine which types of programs are most effective in raising scores. A preliminary report will be released in December 2006.

The California Department of Education invites school districts to share model remediation programs through its Web site. The University of California and California State University have teamed up with districts to design model courses and are also sharing their findings.

Virginia started its Project Graduation in 2003 in part to help students pass its exit exams. The state made use of pilot programs in a few districts during the summer of 2003 to create the framework for a statewide program of “summer academy” grants in 2004. In addition, the state’s Web site contains contact information for district-level administrators who manage particularly effective remediation programs.

Sources: Center on Education Policy, based on its own 2005 report and on news reports cited in box.

Remediation in Four States

The section below draws upon our surveys, research studies and media reports to describe the effectiveness of remediation in Massachusetts, California, Indiana, and Arizona.

Massachusetts

In recent years, funding for the state’s MCAS remediation programs at the high school level has dropped. In FY 2006, it was \$7.58 million, down from \$7.65 million in FY 2005. The state does not require students who fail the exam to enroll in remediation programs, except for those initiating an appeal to have the exit exam requirement waived. The MCAS has counted as a graduation requirement since 2003.

Higher pass rates for students in remediation programs

In 2005, the nonprofit education watchdog group Mass Insight Education and Research Institute completed a study of remediation programs in three cities: Boston, Springfield, and Worcester. The study found that students who participated in remediation programs in all three cities had higher subsequent scores on the MCAS than students who did not participate (Mass Insight, 2005). **Table 5** compares second-try pass rates in Worcester high schools for students who participated in remediation and those who did not.

One major problem the Mass Insight study found with remediation programs is getting all eligible students to participate. Of the three Massachusetts districts combined, about 70% of students who did not pass the MCAS on the first try attended remediation sessions, but many dropped out. In the end only about half of eligible students attended remediation until they actually passed. The main reasons students gave for not attending were family and job responsibilities, and the belief they could pass MCAS without attending remediation. Students who were eligible for remediation sessions but did not participate tended to be males who were not immigrants; no participation patterns emerged on the basis of race/ethnicity or income.

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State High School Exit Exams: A Challenging Year

Table 5 Pass Rates on MCAS Retests for Students Participating and Not Participating in Remediation Efforts (Worcester Public Schools Class of 2003)		
Subject	2 nd try pass rate for remediation participants	2 nd try pass rate for nonparticipants
English/language arts	73%	39%
Mathematics	66%	40%
Overall	66%	39%

Table reads: Seventy-three percent of students in the class of 2003 who participated in remediation programs in Worcester, Massachusetts, passed the English MCAS on their second try, compared with just 39% of nonparticipants.

Source: Mass Insight, 2005

Low initial scores predict low attendance

Mass Insight also found that students' initial scores on the MCAS were a good predictor of whether or not they would attend remediation sessions: the lower the initial score, the less likely the student would attend remediation. It appears that students who are closer to passing see a greater benefit from attending sessions than those with low scores, who may be more pessimistic about their chances of passing. Of students who stopped attending remediation sessions, or who attended irregularly, about 40% believed they would never pass the MCAS. Therefore, it seems that student motivation is a key factor in the success of remediation programs. **Box 3** examines this issue more closely.

Assigning local staff specifically to remediation appears to be effective

The Mass Insight study examined the administration of remediation programs to identify which types of arrangements worked best. The researchers found that the Worcester school district's highly centralized approach to remediation works well compared with the approaches used by the other two districts. The Worcester district's central office has an Academic Support District Program Coordinator position, a person in charge of remediation programs. This person works with staff at high schools to develop curricula based on data generated from MCAS results, conducts professional development and training sessions, and shares best practices. This person is supported by a data specialist and other support staff. Below that layer, each high school has an MCAS coordinator and an after-school remediation administrator. The MCAS coordinators are not simply teachers or administrators who decided to take on additional responsibility; rather, they work solely on MCAS support for students. Their responsibilities are to work with the district program coordinator and high school staff to identify at-risk students and get them into remediation programs, schedule and staff the remediation sessions, oversee the curriculum of the remediation sessions, and oversee the actual administration of the test at the high school.

In-school remediation may improve attendance

Mass Insight found that of students eligible for remediation but not attending, 63% said they would do so if remediation programs were held during the regular school day. Worcester has responded by offering remediation programs during the school day, rather than after school, because attendance is higher. Other Massachusetts districts have also found some success with this approach; at-risk students are assigned to an MCAS math or English class which they must attend as if it were one of their regular classes. Typically, students must give up an "open" period in their schedule, or an elective, depending on their academic status. Students are required to attend, and they receive course credit. Mass Insight found some evidence that attendance was lower in schools that did not make remediation courses mandatory for at-risk students, and that did not provide various types of credit for remediation courses. Moreover, in-school remediation has the advantage of not competing with students' after-school work, sports, or other activities.

In addition, holding remediation courses during regular school hours saves money; indeed, the impetus for moving the courses to regular school hours was recent state budget cuts for remediation. Interestingly, Massachusetts recently allotted \$475,000 in the form of grants to districts that want to examine the feasibility of a longer school day (for example, to 4:00 p.m.); part of the impetus is to improve student performance on the MCAS (MacCormack, 2005).

Worcester has also had some success with evening sessions, so-called "MCAS Nights." Although the number of students attending was small, their pass rate was 100%. The district also partnered with a nonprofit organization to have Saturday remediation sessions at a local shopping mall. After completing the course, students received a \$50 mall gift certificate.

A 2003 study by Mass Insight addressed the question of what motivates students to attend remediation sessions, as attendance in these sessions helped many students ultimately pass the MCAS. The researchers polled students eligible for remediation (those who did not pass the MCAS at least once) in Boston, Springfield, and Worcester about what motivated them to attend. The students could give multiple responses. The top responses were that students wanted to pass the test (82%); and/or they were encouraged by a teacher or administrator (71%), their parents (68%), or their friends (48%).

Next, through surveys, researchers tried to identify factors that kept students from attending. As the accompanying Mass Insight study noted, students with very low test scores on their initial attempt were less likely to attend remediation. In addition, students answered that they have too many other responsibilities (54%), they could pass the test on their own without remediation (45%), or they did not want to stay after school (42%).

To get a fuller picture than the surveys provided, the researchers also used focus groups of students who had not passed the MCAS, and found a great deal of resentment toward the test. Part of the resentment seemed to stem from overconfidence, or not having an indication of their readiness for the exam until they failed it:

- Seventy one percent of the students not passing the MCAS and eligible for remediation expected to go on to college.
- Many students who did not pass the MCAS reported that they were getting adequate grades in school (the researchers did not compare actual grades to test scores but relied on students' self-reports).
- Through their years of schooling, the feedback they were getting from their teachers led them to believe they would graduate. This is most likely due to a disconnect between classroom standards and MCAS standards, according to the study's authors.
- The rationale for making the exam a graduation requirement was unclear. Many of the students' older peers did not have to take the MCAS to graduate.

Because of this frustration, most students eligible for remediation felt that passing classes should be adequate to earn a diploma. On the other hand, the pressure of having to pass the MCAS was having some positive effects in terms of more classroom effort for the at-risk students.

Some of these positive and negative attitudes on the part of students also appeared in focus groups CEP did with students in two districts in Maryland and Virginia, as part of our aforementioned 2005 report. Our focus groups sampled all students, not just those in remediation. Students in CEP's focus groups reported that they paid more attention in class and studied harder. However, like Mass Insight, we also found some demotivating factors. Many students did not understand the rationale for exit exams because they did not seem relevant to life after high school; for example, colleges did not see the scores. Like students in Massachusetts, Virginia students felt attendance and adequate grades should be enough to graduate from high school. In Maryland, where the exit exam was just becoming an exit exam requirement, we found a number of students who were unaware that they now had to pass in order to graduate.

Mass Insight also found that students were getting mixed messages about the test from parents and teachers. As mentioned above, students named teachers and parents as motivating factors, but large majorities of non-passing students identified them as demotivating factors. Seventy-one percent of non-passers reported negative parental attitudes toward the MCAS, and 68% reported a negative attitude toward the MCAS on the part of teachers. This is not necessarily contradictory. The messages could come from different teachers or parents, or, as the authors speculated, parents might disparage the MCAS but at the same time urge their children to attend remediation sessions. CEP's study of Maryland and Virginia also detected a defeatist attitude among some teachers and administrators, but it was not clear that these attitudes were communicated to students.

Despite these demotivating factors, Mass Insight found that the percentage of eligible students who signed up for remediation increased over time, and that students found the remediation sessions helpful.

Sources: Mass Insight, 2003 and 2005; CEP, 2005.

California

California is spending \$57.5 million on remediation programs for the CAHSEE exam for the 2006-07 fiscal year, almost triple the amount of last year. This is because political leaders agreed that the \$20 million the California legislature appropriated for tutoring programs in 2005-06 was not enough. The funding was allotted on the basis of \$600 per eligible student, which amounted to eligibility for about 33,000 students. But the funds only went to pay for extra courses and materials in schools with the highest failure rates—those with over 28% of students not passing. Many districts and schools with slightly smaller percentages also needed funds, so spending had to be increased (Williams, 2006).

Last year's evaluation of the CAHSEE exit exam in California by the Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO) found that, as in Massachusetts, the vast majority of remediation courses—over 90%—are offered during normal school hours. Most courses, over 80%, run for the entire school year, rather than for just a few weeks. In California, the majority of students in the remediation classes tend to be in the 9th or 10th grades; enrollment falls off for 11th or 12th graders.

A need to reach out to at-risk students

HumRRO's report, like the Mass Insight study, found that student motivation is a key variable in the effectiveness of remediation courses. Researchers polled almost 200 California teachers who led required remedial courses and asked them what factors most limited the effectiveness of remediation; results are displayed in **table 6**.

These three factors—motivation, attendance, and parental support—also showed up as the top three reasons for students not passing the CAHSEE among teachers of non-remedial classes, although the percentages were lower. The superintendent of schools in Long Beach, California, told a reporter that the district is providing adequate services to students, and those who go through them do well, but that “it's the group of kids who don't show up and have sporadic attendance...we are concerned about” (Butler, 2005).

Table 6

Perceptions of California Remediation Teachers about Factors That Limit the Effectiveness of Remediation Courses

Factor Limiting Course Effectiveness	Percentage of Teachers Citing Factor
Low student motivation	70%
Low parental support	43%
Low student attendance	39%
Low English proficiency	25%
Lack of materials/resources	7%
Teacher's own difficulty engaging students	6%
Limited teacher knowledge/experience	4%

Table reads: Forty-three percent of teachers in remediation courses cited low parental support as a factor that limits the effectiveness of remediation courses.

Source: Human Resources Research Organization, 2005, p. 126.

HumRRO also polled teachers of remedial classes on the effectiveness of the programs—in particular whether they were “meeting expectations” in terms of what the remedial classes set out to do. Most teachers (73%) felt the remediation courses were effective, but a sizable minority (15%) said that remediation courses were not effectively geared toward the needs of individual students who face more extreme challenges—migrant and transient students, English language learners or immigrant students with little previous education, students in foster care, and students with other special needs.

Indiana

Indiana allotted \$4.8 million for FY 2005-06 for remediation programs to help students pass the state’s GQE. The state uses a formula-based approach to distribute funds through the ISTEP Remediation/Prevention Grant Program. The funds are released on the basis of the number of students in a district who did not pass the GQE. Districts receive \$90 per student and test (if a student does not pass two parts, the district receives \$180), and \$15.56 per failed retest.

These funds are in addition to other funds provided for remediation at all levels, including high school. Here again, Indiana uses a formula. It divides the scores of non-passers into three tiers: in tier one are students with the lowest scores, in tier two are students with mid-range low scores, and in tier three are students who missed passing by just a few points. The grant program allots \$34.50 per student in tier one, \$11.50 per student in tier two, and \$5.00 per student in tier three.

Participation in the grants program by districts is voluntary; districts also set their own policies about requiring students to attend courses and scheduling courses. However, remediation courses are mandatory for students who wish to apply for a waiver of the exit exam requirement, which also requires a C average, approval by school officials, and a 95% attendance rate. The state provides guides for use by teachers who administer the remediation sessions, and also posts sample tests and past versions of the GQE.

Indiana districts administer the remediation sessions during regular school days as well as during summer school. There are also opportunities for remediation through adult education programs (McCollum, 2006).

Remediation helps, along with other factors

A 2000 evaluation of remediation programs done for the Indiana Department of Education found, like the Mass Insight and HumRRO studies, that remediation programs in the state were effective, but other factors also contributed to higher second-attempt test scores (CTB/McGraw-Hill, 2000). The evaluation was done to review the effectiveness of remediation during the first years the exit exam started as a requirement of graduation. Indiana officials apparently wanted to get an idea of what types of remediation approaches worked best, but the differences among the various remediation approaches (such as school-day classes, individual tutoring, and test preparation classes) in terms of their effect on test scores were not statistically significant.

Overall, the gains were modest. In mathematics, students who participated in remediation sessions showed slightly higher gains on retests than students who did not participate; but they scored lower on English language arts, as indicated in **table 7**.

Table 7

GQE Mathematics and English Scores for Participants and Nonparticipants in Indiana Remediation Programs, 1997 and 1998

	Average score on initial 1997 test	Average score on 1998 retest	Average score gain	Percentage passing 1998 retest
Mathematics (passing score=486)				
Nonparticipants (1,266)	449.7	468.7	11.6	35%
Participants (8,920)	448.7	471.6	15.4	37%
Total (10,186)	448.8	471.2	14.9	37%
English (passing score=466)				
Nonparticipants (799)	435.5	459.9	15.3	50%
Participants (5,899)	432.0	457.6	16.2	46%
Total (6,698)	432.4	457.8	16.1	46%

Table reads: Participants in mathematics remediation programs in Indiana gained an average of 15.4 points on their second try on the mathematics portion of the state exit exam; nonparticipants gained 11.6 points.

Source: CTB/McGraw Hill, 2000, pp. 42 & 45.

Despite the lower scores of participants in English language arts remediation, the authors of the study still found remediation to have a slight effect because the average gain in their scores was a little higher than those of nonparticipants. In mathematics, the study also found that more hours spent in remediation was correlated with higher scores, but this was not the case with English language arts. However, the authors added a number of factors that complicate the measurement of the effectiveness of remediation. Among these were the following:

- In some high schools, all students were getting some form of remediation, in the form of extra time spent in class reviewing material for the GQE; this had the effect of blurring the line between participants and nonparticipants.
- Many students will do better on retests even without remediation, simply because of the time that passes between the initial tests and retests. Students are a year older, have had an additional year of schooling, and may be more motivated to pass the test when they are a year closer to graduation. Therefore, remediation was seen as one factor among many, rather than a decisive factor, in trying to determine why students pass on their second try.

The study also found that, as in other states, remediation during regular school hours seemed to be the most popular option, because of less interference with students' other activities. Some schools made remediation mandatory, but others did not.

Administrative glitches

There was a problem with the administration of the remediation sessions, which indicated that access to remediation was not uniform for all eligible students. Many high school staff were unaware of the state remediation program and of the resources (such as study guides) that were available for conducting remediation sessions.

Interestingly, Indiana teachers, like some of their counterparts in California, felt that remediation would work better if it was not conducted in small classes with a set curriculum, but rather was tailored to the needs of individual students.

Teachers concerned about student motivation and attendance

Finally, like their counterparts in California and Massachusetts, Indiana educators saw student motivation as a key factor in the effectiveness of remediation programs. In focus groups, teachers pointed to lack of motivation as the main reason for poor performance on the GQE. Sophomores in 1997 were the first class to have the GQE count as a graduation requirement. Teachers reported that many students did not take the test seriously at first, because they had yet to understand the full consequences of not passing.

Arizona

Arizona has expanded its remediation program after last year's effort floundered, largely due to administrative issues at both the state and district levels.

In December 2004 the Arizona state legislature made available \$10 million for tutoring students who had not passed the AIMS exam. The state department of education moved quickly and set up an online system for allocating money to districts by the first week of January 2005, and made February 1 the deadline for the first round of applications for funding. School districts could apply online to get \$270 per student—nine hours of tutoring at \$30 per hour. Approximately 20,000 students were initially signed up. That was only about half the number of students who failed the exit exam, but some students were already enrolled in existing district-level remediation programs.

In the subsequent months, only about 2,500 students actually received tutoring. District officials indicated that there were too many administrative barriers to using the money. The timeline was tight—students who failed the test had to be identified, signed up, and tutored before the next administration of the test in April 2005. In schools where many students had not passed, district officials felt it was not feasible to gather enough tutors in just a few months. In addition, some districts did not have the administrative resources to document the number of students served, their names and student identification numbers, and the number of hours of tutoring they received in a given subject area in order to be reimbursed by the state department of education. The districts were also required to report, at the end of the school year, the number of students who had received tutoring and then passed or did not pass the subsequent AIMS test.

This year, more funding, more classes, and better communication

Two million dollars of last year's money was spent on AIMS preparatory workbooks for this year, and the rest of the money was returned to the general fund. For the 2006-07 fiscal year, the legislature increased funding to \$12.5 million. To better spend these funds this year, the state launched a telephone hotline and Web site to provide information on remediation and sample tests for the AIMS test (Associated Press, 2006).

Along with the extra funding, the state has increased the number of hours of remediation available. Seniors who do not pass sections of the AIMS qualify for 90 hours of individualized or small group tutoring in the topic of the failed test; juniors qualify for 75 hours. Seniors who have fulfilled all of their graduation requirements except passing the AIMS are eligible for 60 hours of tutoring during the summer after their senior year. The state does not require tutoring, but parents must sign a form indicating that they accept or decline the service.

Approved outside contractors can provide tutoring, but this is currently available only in one district. State Superintendent Tom Horne has also tried to enlist community colleges to provide AIMS remediation, but early reports indicate that they are balking at the idea (Scarpinato, 2005).

Conclusion

The available evidence, although limited, suggests that remediation programs are effective in helping students pass exit exams after failing at their initial attempts. States and districts are experimenting with a number of different approaches to remediation and trying to figure out what works. More research is needed on what types of remediation work best; as we noted, a few states are gathering information on this issue. Some evidence shows that holding remediation sessions during regular school hours is optimal.

It is clear that student motivation is a key factor in the success of remediation programs; this was a common element among all studies of this topic. Getting at-risk students to attend sessions is a problem. In states just introducing exit exams, there may be resentment toward the exit exam requirement among students who have not passed but believe that their academic abilities are adequate to qualify them for a diploma. Students with very low initial scores are less motivated and more pessimistic about their ability to pass than students who scored just below passing. This group of lowest-performing students represents the biggest challenge for policymakers examining remediation programs; Indiana specifically allots more per-student remediation funds for those with the lowest scores.

California, Washington, and Arizona have boosted spending on remediation because exit exams are now or will soon become a graduation requirement, and education leaders want to avoid the political fallout of low pass rates. However, evidence also indicates that spending on remediation falls off after the initial “high-pressure” phase; this was the case in Indiana and Massachusetts. It is worth noting that according to our survey, 11 states do not fund remediation programs for their exit exams. It may be that once exit exams become more entrenched in a state’s educational landscape and instruction becomes better aligned with the exam and with state content standards, the need for emergency spending diminishes. It may also be the case that, over time, media and public scrutiny of the exit exam requirement fades. This lessens the political pressure for remediation spending, even if pass rates are still problematic.

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Chapter 3: Impact of Exit Exams

Key Findings

- Officials from states with exit exams reported on our survey that students are being required or encouraged to spend more classroom time on tested subjects—typically reading, writing, mathematics, and science. In a few states, our survey respondents specifically mentioned that exit exams were encouraging students to take more math courses or start courses like algebra earlier. In addition, states reported that exit exams are spurring school districts to more closely align instruction with state content standards.
- The effects of exit exams on student motivation and achievement are not yet well understood; research findings are mixed.
- The overall percentage of students passing exit exams on the first try varies across states, but tends to range from about 70% to 90%. In most states with exit exams, initial pass rates changed only slightly, up or down, between 2004 and 2005, but some states had marked increases or decreases. Pass rates were far lower in the two states that were administering exit exams but not yet withholding diplomas.
- Even though some states have made improvement toward reducing initial pass rate gaps, alarming achievement gaps persist. Noticeable gaps exist between racial/ethnic subgroups and between all students and low-income students. In nearly all states with exit exams, initial pass rates are lower for English language learners than for students overall. And with very few exceptions, students with disabilities had the lowest initial pass rates on exit exams among all subgroups.
- Most states did not provide data on the percentage of students who eventually pass state exit exams by the end of 12th grade. Moreover, it is difficult to know how much stock to put in cumulative pass rates among the few states that track them. Methods for calculating these rates vary, and some states do not count students who drop out before the final test administration in their calculations.
- Based on the limited data available, gaps in cumulative pass rates for racial/ethnic subgroups, low-income students, English language learners, and students with disabilities are smaller than gaps in initial pass rates but still wide enough to cause concern. Cumulative pass rates suggest that significant percentages of minority and low-income students, English language learners, and students with disabilities are not passing exit exams, which puts them at risk of not graduating.
- New studies show that exit exams may have a negative impact on graduation rates. But the results are complex, and exit exams do not seem to be very high on the list of factors that influence a student's decision to drop out.

- In only 4 of the 25 states with current or planned exit exams do public universities and community colleges use these exam results for admissions purposes, and even then, not all the state's public postsecondary institutions do. But while passing a state exit exam does not directly help with college admissions in most states, *not* passing the exam can affect students' ability to attend college.

Whether students are learning more because of exit exam requirements is a central question in the policy debate about exit exams, but it's not the only question. Even if it can be shown that students on average are learning more, policymakers and the public must also consider whether exit exams produce other effects, positive or negative. Are exit exams changing curriculum and instruction in positive or negative ways? Are large numbers of students in general failing exit exams? Are some subgroups of students failing—and being denied diplomas—at disproportionate rates? What impact do exit exams have on dropout rates? Do universities take exit exams into account to determine admission?

This chapter examines the impact of exit exams from several perspectives. In particular, the chapter does the following:

- Reports information from our survey about the impact of exit exams on curriculum and instruction
- Reviews recent research on the relationship between exit exams and student achievement
- Analyzes data from our survey about initial and cumulative pass rates on exit exams for all students and for specific groups of students
- Summarizes recent studies from different sources about the relationship between exit exams and high school graduation rates
- Reports findings from our survey about the use of exit exam results by colleges and universities

Impact on Curriculum and Instruction

Evidence continues to accumulate that exit exams are causing changes in the general curriculum and instruction that students receive. This year, we asked state officials an open-ended survey question about the effect of their exit exam on course offerings. The results were somewhat incomplete; officials in many states responded that they did not know because they did not have data. Typically, course offerings are determined at the district level. Judging from the brief responses, however, it appears that more emphasis and time are being placed on tested subjects.

Aside from mentioning special remediation courses, which are discussed in chapter 2, states most often responded that students are being encouraged to take more courses in the tested subjects—typically reading, writing, mathematics, and science. Most notable is the push to have students take more mathematics courses, earlier. Indiana officials said that students are encouraged to take Algebra I as freshmen; Massachusetts officials reported a greater emphasis on having students complete courses in algebra and geometry by the end of their sophomore year.

States also reported that more attention is being paid to reading and writing. Our survey respondent in Massachusetts specifically noted that more instructional time is spent teaching students to answer open-ended questions.

In states with end-of-course graduation tests, such as New York, Maryland, and Oklahoma, the exams are closely tied to prescribed courses of study. An official from Alabama said that the exam has not had an effect on the courses students take because the state has always had a course of study that students must follow. However, the official reported that as the rigor of the exam has increased, so has the rigor of the courses.

Another major reason for the increased time spent on mathematics and reading is the federal No Child Left Behind Act. CEP's 2006 report on NCLB also found that more time was being spent on tested subjects at the expense of non-tested subjects and electives (Center on Education Policy, 2006). It is impossible to sort out whether changes in curriculum and instruction are mostly due to exit exams, to NCLB, or to other factors. But media reports indicate that "doubling-up" of tested subjects is occurring in many states, including Texas, California, Florida, and Washington (Cavanagh, 2006; Shaw, 2005).

In addition to affecting course offerings, exit exams are causing districts to more closely align instruction with state content standards. The ongoing evaluation of California's exit exam program found that alignment of instruction to state content standards has improved over the past several years (HumRRO, 2005; 2006). For the 2004-05 school year, nearly 95% of high school principals reported that state content standards were completely or mostly covered in both mathematics and English language arts. These numbers have been steadily climbing since 2002-03. Middle school principals have also indicated a steady increase in coverage of content standards; however, the reported coverage of content standards in middle school is consistently less than that in high school. This is not surprising, because middle schools probably do not feel as much responsibility to prepare students for the exams. The CAHSEE evaluation also found that most high school and middle school teachers have participated in content-related professional development to help them teach the content standards assessed by the CAHSEE.

CEP's 2005 study of the impacts of high school exit exams in two school districts (one in Virginia and the other in Maryland) offers further evidence that exit exams are having noticeable effects on instructional content and methods (Center on Education Policy, 2005). The state contexts differed in several key respects; for instance, Virginia has been using end-of-course exams as a graduation requirement since 2004, whereas Maryland's end-of course exams will not kick in as a requirement until 2009. Still, several common findings emerged from both districts. Teachers in both districts have revised their instruction to emphasize topics and skills likely to be tested and to spend more time reviewing information and test-taking skills, especially as testing time approaches. They have also revised in-class assessments to more closely resemble the format and substance of exit exams. Teachers and administrators reported that the benefits of exit exams include encouraging educators and others to talk about student performance, promoting greater cooperation among teachers (including regular education and special education teachers), and making resistant teachers actually adhere to the curriculum. The drawbacks brought up in both districts include a decreased emphasis on higher-level skills, less time for valuable activities and subjects not covered on the exit exam, and the push to cover more content at the expense of delving deeper into a particular subject area.

Impact on Student Motivation and Achievement

Do students learn more when they face an exit exam requirement? In past years we have reported that studies have yielded mixed results about the effects of high school exit exams on student achievement (Center on Education Policy, 2002; 2003; 2004). Some studies suggest that exit exams do not raise student achievement, while others suggest positive effects. Our 2004 report explained some of the difficulties in studying this topic and the limitations of existing research.

Over the past year, evidence from the ongoing CAHSEE evaluation (HumRRO, 2005) suggests that California students are taking the exit exam more seriously. In response to a questionnaire, higher percentages of first time test-takers in the class of 2007 than in the class of 2006 reported that they perceived the exit exam as important, expected to graduate from high school, and had plans to go to college. Economically disadvantaged students or those who did not pass the tests were more likely than other students to perceive the exit exam as important to them and to make an extra effort beyond their regular coursework to prepare for it. They were also more likely to be concerned that the exam would make it harder for them to graduate from high school, uncertain about their high school graduation, nervous when taking the tests, and unfamiliar with the test questions. Economically disadvantaged students also reported that the test questions were more difficult than regular coursework.

To explore the effects of California's exit exam on student outcomes HumRRO researchers have been tracking trends in exit exam pass rates and dropout rates (reported later in this chapter). The researchers have also been looking at the rigor of coursework undertaken in high school and students' readiness to enter college as additional indicators of student achievement. In its latest evaluation (2006), HumRRO reported mixed results about indicators of achievement:

- On college entrance exams, the percentage of students taking the SAT declined in 2003 and 2004 but then increased somewhat over 2004 levels in 2005. The percentage of students earning a combined score of 1000 or greater reached a high in 2005, and the average SAT score increased steadily between 2003 and 2005. In contrast, the percentage of students taking the ACT increased over that same time frame, but average ACT scores have remained relatively flat.
- Since 2000, participation in Advanced Placement exams has increased steadily, and the number of passing scores of 3 or greater has also risen.
- The University of California and California State University systems have developed a list of courses known as "A-G courses" that are required for incoming freshmen. The percentage of high school graduates who have completed A-G courses has held fairly steady at about a third of the graduating class each year. There has been a slight decrease since a peak in 2001.
- Percentages of California high school graduates enrolling as first-time freshmen decreased in both University of California and California State University institutions in 2003 and 2004, while enrollment rates in California community colleges dropped in 2003 then increased in 2004.
- The researchers have concluded that these results provide a mixed view of the state of education in California high schools in recent years.

In CEP's 2005 case study districts, many students in Virginia mentioned test pressure or nervousness about passing the exit exams as a problem. Older students who had failed state end-of-course exams in the past expressed the greatest concerns about their ability to graduate, while younger students were more upbeat. Some students had positive things to say about the exams. Several agreed that they pay more attention in class and study harder because of the exams, but others expressed concerns about the tests' fairness and relevance, believing that some students "don't test well," or questioning why the exams should matter to them. In contrast, in the Maryland district, where the exit exam is not yet a requirement, few students said they felt pressured or nervous about their performance on the exams. More discussion of research related to motivation, especially on the part of students who initially fail the exams, is provided in chapter 2.

Exit Exam Pass Rates

Due to the high stakes attached to high school exit exams, the percentages of students passing these tests merit close attention. States generally monitor two types of pass rates: initial pass rates, which tell the percentage of students who passed the exit exam on the first try, and cumulative pass rates, which show the percentage of students who passed the exam by the end of 12th grade, sometimes after multiple retakes.

Both initial and cumulative pass rate calculations are controversial. Methods for calculating pass rates vary across states, and slight variations in formulas can lead to divergent results. Controversies about these calculations often focus on how many students are counted in the denominator—in other words, the universe of students against which the number passing the test is compared—and at what point in their schooling these students are counted. For cumulative pass rates in particular, this denominator number can vary widely, and in many states the calculations exclude students who have dropped out before the final exam administration.

Initial Pass Rates

Although students can retake exit exams in every state, initial pass rates matter greatly because states must target extensive resources so schools can assist students who fail on the first try. With so many students requiring remediation, states face a major challenge in ensuring that students are prepared for subsequent administrations and can graduate on time.

Most states reported initial pass rates on our 2006 survey that were similar to those provided last year, although several states reported gains in overall initial pass rates, as well as gains in pass rates for students of color and low-income students. This year, we received disaggregated initial pass rate data from 23 states, mostly from tests administered in 2005.

Overall initial pass rates

As shown in **table 8**, the overall percentage of students passing exit exams on the first try varies across states but tends to range from about 70% to 90%. Initial pass rates from different states vary not only because of differences in student performance, but also due to differences among states in curriculum standards, test content and difficulty, test alignment, students' familiarity with the exam, and other factors. As a result, pass rates are not directly comparable and should not be used to compare student performance between states. It is impossible to determine whether a student passing an exit exam in one state would pass the exit exam in another state. It is also difficult to compare across years because states change their standards or make other modifications that can affect the challenge level of the exam and the pass rates. Also, in states that have not yet withheld diplomas, students may have less incentive to perform well.

Pass rates were far lower in Maryland and Washington, the two states that were administering exit exams but not yet withholding diplomas. (Oklahoma is not yet administering all the tests that will be part of its exit exam system.) In Maryland, for example, the initial pass rate on the English language arts test was just 57%, while in most states the rate exceeded 75%. Similarly, only 48% of students in Washington passed the math test, while most other states had initial math pass rates of over 70%. In past years, we found similar patterns of lower pass rates in states that had not yet attached consequences to their exams.

In states where consequences are in place, initial pass rates in English language arts (ELA) or reading ranged from 52% in Florida to 95% in Georgia. Initial pass rates in math varied from a low of 64% in Nevada and Indiana to a high of 92% in Georgia and Mississippi. On writing tests, pass rates were generally high and ranged from 72% in Arizona to 98% in New Mexico. Fewer states administered science or social studies tests than English language arts and math exams. Among states testing science, initial pass rates ranged from 68% in Georgia to 95% in Tennessee. The pass rates on social studies exams spanned from 76% in New Mexico to 96% in Mississippi.

For most states, initial pass rates changed only slightly, up or down, between 2004 and 2005; often the gains or declines amounted to just a few percentage points. But some states had more substantial increases and decreases in their overall pass rates between 2004 and 2005, as displayed in **table 9**.

Arizona, for example, reported gains of 13 percentage points in the initial pass rates for English language arts and 28 percentage points in the rates for math. Although writing is not included in table 9, Arizona's pass rates in this subject improved by 10 percentage points. In 2005, Arizona began allowing students who failed the exit exam to "augment" their exam scores if they earned passing grades in key subjects and met certain other criteria (see chapter 5). In addition, the Arizona exam was realigned with revised curriculum standards. These policy changes may account for a portion of the steep improvements in Arizona's pass rates.

In Texas, pass rates decreased by 13 percentage points in math; the rates also fell by 14 percentage points in science and 6 in social studies (the latter two subjects are not shown on the table). Texas raised the cut score needed to pass its exit exam in spring 2005, according to our state survey, so the lower pass rates for this state may well be related to that change. Idaho, which also saw a decline in pass rates between 2004 and 2005, set higher passing scores for the class of 2007 (which first took the exit exam in 2005) than for the class of 2006 (which first took the exam in 2004).

Table 8

Percentages of Students Passing State Exit Exams on the First Try, 2005
 (except where noted)

Tests	English			Math	Science	Social Studies
	Reading	ELA	Writing			
Alabama High School Graduation Exam ¹	86%	81%		78%	81%	76%
Alaska High School Graduation Qualifying Exam	69%		84%	72%		
Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards	72%		72%	67%		
California High School Exit Exam		76%		74%		
Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test	52%			77%		
Georgia High School Graduation Tests		95%	89%	92%	68%	83%
Idaho Standards Achievement Test	90%	86%		78%		
Indiana Graduation Qualifying Exam (2003 pass rates for the class of 2006)		68%		64%		
Louisiana Graduation Exit Examination	85%		76%	81%	82%	
Maryland High School Assessment		57%		54%	58%	66%
Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System		89%		85%		
Minnesota Basic Skills Test ²	85%		92%	74%		
Mississippi Subject Area Testing Program		83%	91%	92%	92%	96%
Nevada High School Proficiency Examination ³	83%		91%	64%		
New Jersey High School Proficiency Assessment		83%		76%		
New Mexico High School Competency Examination	91%	82%	98%	83%	79%	76%
North Carolina Competency Tests	89%			85%		
Ohio Graduation Tests	91%		82%	80%	71%	91%
South Carolina High School Assessment Program		86%		76%		
Tennessee Gateway Examinations		91%		73%	95%	
Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills		87%		72%	71%	91%
Virginia Standards of Learning End-of-Course Exams ⁴		85%	88%	84%	79%	88%
Washington Assessment of Student Learning	73%		65%	48%	36%	

Table reads: The first time students took the Alaska High School Graduation Qualifying Exam in 2005, 69% passed the reading section, 84% passed the writing section, and 72% passed the math section.

¹ Alabama's pass rates represent the percentage of students passing after spring testing of 11th grade, which would have been their second rather than their first opportunity to take the test; Alabama offers a "pre-graduation" administration of its exit exam in 10th grade.

² Minnesota's results for writing are from the 2006 administration.

³ Nevada's pass rates for the reading and math tests represent the percentage of students passing after spring testing of 11th grade, which would have been their second rather than their first opportunity to take the tests; Nevada first administers these two tests in spring of 10th grade. The pass rates for the writing test represent the percentage of 11th graders passing the first time they took the test.

⁴ Virginia has three end-of-course tests in math, three in science, and four in social studies. The pass rates included in this table are for Algebra I, biology, and Virginia and U.S. history. In addition, Virginia's pass rates for all subjects shown include students who passed the exam after taking an "expedited retest" (see the state profiles).

Source: Center on Education Policy, exit exam survey of state departments of education, June 2006, item 31.

Table 9

Changes Between 2004 and 2005 in the Percentage of Students Passing Exit Exams on the First Try in a Sample of States

	All Students		White		African American		Latino		Asian		Native American		ELLs		Free or reduced-priced lunch eligible		Students with disabilities	
	2004	2005	Diff.	2004	2005	Diff.	2004	2005	Diff.	2004	2005	Diff.	2004	2005	Diff.	2004	2005	Diff.
Reading/English Language Arts¹																		
Arizona	59%	72%	13	76%	85%	9	49%	64%	15	37%	56%	19	72%	84%	12	31%	48%	17
Idaho	90%	90%	0	93%	93%	0	80%	80%	0	67%	68%	1	86%	83%	-3	87%	80%	-7
Maryland	53%	57%	4	65%	71%	6	35%	39%	4	40%	46%	6	71%	75%	4	49%	52%	3
Massachusetts	89%	89%	0	93%	94%	1	78%	76%	-2	69%	69%	0	90%	89%	-1	86%	86%	0
Texas	87%	87%	0	92%	93%	1	82%	82%	0	81%	80%	-1	91%	92%	1	89%	88%	-1
Washington	65%	73%	8	70%	77%	7	43%	54%	11	41%	53%	12	71%	79%	8	46%	56%	10
Mathematics																		
Arizona	39%	67%	28	53%	80%	27	23%	54%	31	20%	52%	32	64%	84%	20	17%	44%	27
Idaho	86%	78%	-8	88%	81%	-7	76%	56%	-20	66%	53%	-13	90%	81%	-9	74%	56%	-18
Maryland	59%	54%	-5	73%	71%	-2	35%	30%	-5	50%	42%	-8	81%	80%	-1	51%	47%	-4
Massachusetts	85%	85%	0	90%	90%	0	68%	64%	-4	63%	61%	-2	91%	91%	0	79%	73%	-6
Texas	85%	72%	-13	91%	83%	-8	73%	54%	-19	78%	61%	-17	95%	89%	-6	88%	75%	-13
Washington	44%	48%	4	49%	52%	3	16%	20%	4	20%	24%	4	52%	57%	5	23%	26%	3

Table reads: On the reading portion of the Arizona exit exam administered in 2004, 59% of all students taking the test received a passing score on their first attempt. On the same exam administered in 2005, 72% of all students taking the test received a passing score on their first attempt, an increase in initial pass rates of 13 percentage points.

¹ The pass rates shown in the table are for reading tests in Arizona, Idaho, and Washington; for English language arts tests in Massachusetts and Texas; and for the English 2 test in Maryland.

Note: The columns of the table labeled "Diff." show the percentage point differences in pass rates between 2004 and 2005 for each group. A positive number in this column signifies that pass rates increased between 2004 and 2005, while a negative number signifies that pass rates decreased during that period.

Source: *Center on Education Policy, exit exam surveys of state departments of education, June 2006, item 31, and July 2005.*

General trends in initial pass rates for student subgroups

A central issue in debates about the fairness and effectiveness of exit exams is the disproportionately lower pass rates for some subgroups of students. Our data for 2006 continue to show achievement gaps in initial pass rates for students of color and low-income students (those eligible for free or reduced-price school lunches). In general, minority and low-income subgroups showed either flat rates or small gains in pass rates, although several states reported significant gains for several subgroups. Gaps are also apparent for English language learners and students with disabilities, as discussed later in this section.

In addition to showing changes in initial pass rates for all students, table 9 breaks out these rates for various subgroups for 2004 and 2005 for a sample of states. Other states' disaggregated pass rates can be found in their profiles at the end of this report.

States that showed gains among the majority of student subgroups included Alaska (math), Arizona (math and reading/language arts), Maryland (English), New Jersey (math), and Washington (math and reading). These gains appear to be occurring primarily in states with exit exams that have only recently been used, or will soon be used, to withhold diplomas, and the trend may indicate a growing stability in policies and improvement in student preparation with time.

Surprisingly, several states also showed decreases in pass rates in math for most student subgroups; these included Idaho, Maryland, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas. These significant decreases in math are difficult to explain, except for Texas which raised its passing scores, and Idaho, which set a higher passing score for the class of 2007 than for the class of 2006. Other states may have simply fielded exams that were slightly harder this year than in years past. That was the case in New York several years ago.

Pass rates for subgroups in most states were often more varied than in the states highlighted above. Most states had no clear patterns of gains or losses for subgroups; the results were usually a mixed bag of minor increases and decreases.

On the whole, pass rates reported for 2005 offer reason for cautious optimism, in that pass rates for some subgroups in some states have improved somewhat more than the average improvement for all students, although large achievement gaps remain. Until states truly understand the factors that lead to these successes, it will be difficult to sustain them over time.

Gaps in initial pass rates for students of color and low-income students

Table 10 displays the racial/ethnic gaps in initial pass rates on exit exams for a sample of states. The pass rates for other states can be found in the state profiles at the end of this report.

The gaps in pass rates between African American and white students continue to be very large, averaging 20 to 30 percentage points in most states. In reading/English language arts, the disparities between black and white students range from a 5 percentage point gap in Georgia to a 37-point gap in Florida. Gaps in math pass rates vary from a 9 percentage point gap in Mississippi to a 46-point gap in Minnesota. The gaps between white and Latino students are similar, though somewhat smaller on average. For Latino students, gaps in reading/ELA range from 9 percentage points in Tennessee to 29 percentage points in Arizona. The disparities in math pass rates for Latino students vary from a low of 2 percentage points in Mississippi to a high of 35 points in Minnesota.

The gaps between white and Asian students are smaller overall, with Asian students now outperforming their white peers in numerous states, especially in math. A few states, however, including Alaska and Minnesota, show a sizable performance gap, with Asian students passing at lower rates than white students. The disparities between white and Native American students are variable; gaps are generally smaller than those between white and black, or between white and Latino students, but larger than those between white and Asian students.

Table 10

Gaps in Initial Pass Rates on Exit Exams Between White and Minority Students for a Sample of States

Reading/English Language Arts

State	White pass rate	African American pass rate	White-African American gap	Latino pass rate	White-Latino gap	Asian pass rate	White-Asian gap	Native American pass rate	White-Native American gap
Alaska	82%	59%	23	62%	20	59%	23	65%	17
Arizona	85%	64%	21	56%	29	84%	1	48%	37
Florida	65%	28%	37	41%	24	63%	2	61%	4
Georgia	97%	92%	5	86%	11	95%	2	95%	2
Minnesota	90%	56%	34	64%	26	76%	14	67%	23
Mississippi	91%	74%	17	77%	14	88%	3	77%	14
New Jersey	91%	76%	15	66%	25	88%	3	81%	10
Tennessee	94%	83%	11	85%	9	93%	1	83%	11

Mathematics

State	White pass rate	African American pass rate	White-African American gap	Latino pass rate	White-Latino gap	Asian pass rate	White-Asian gap	Native American pass rate	White-Native American gap
Alaska	81%	57%	24	57%	24	74%	7	68%	13
Arizona	80%	54%	26	52%	28	84%	-4	44%	36
Florida	87%	58%	29	71%	16	90%	-3	85%	2
Georgia	97%	86%	11	88%	9	98%	-1	93%	4
Minnesota	81%	35%	46	46%	35	64%	17	47%	34
Mississippi	96%	87%	9	94%	2	96%	0	87%	9
New Jersey	85%	47%	38	57%	28	89%	-4	66%	19
Tennessee	83%	54%	29	73%	10	83%	0	67%	16

Table reads: On the Alaska reading exit exam administered in 2005, 82% of white test-takers passed on the first attempt, compared with 59% of African American test-takers—a gap of 23 percentage points. On the Alaska math exit exam administered in 2005, 81% of white test-takers passed on the first attempt, compared with 57% of African American test-takers—a gap of 24 percentage points.

Note: Negative numbers mean that the subgroup shown had higher pass rates than the white subgroup.

Note: The shaded columns in the table show the gap in pass rates between the two groups noted, expressed as a percentage point difference.

Source: Center on Education Policy, exit exam survey of state departments of education, June 2006, item 31.

As a group, students from low-income families also have lower than average pass rates. **Table 11** displays the gaps in initial pass rates between students from low-income families and all students taking the exit exam. The pass rates for low-income students in other states can be found in the state profiles at the end of this report.

In the states shown in table 11, the gap between low-income students and all students ranged from 4 percentage points in math in Mississippi to 30 percentage points in math in New Jersey, and often exceeded 15 percentage points.

A few states reported disaggregated data for other subgroups, such as migrant students, multiethnic students, and male and female students. However, not enough data were provided to draw meaningful conclusions about these gaps.

Table 11**Gaps in Initial Pass Rates on Exit Exams Between All Students and Low-Income Students for a Sample of States**

State	Reading/English Language Arts			Math		
	Pass rate for all students	Pass rate for low-income students	Percentage point gap	Pass rate for all students	Pass rate for low-income students	Percentage point gap
Alaska	69%	47%	22	72%	55%	17
Arizona	72%	54%	18	67%	50%	17
Florida	52%	35%	17	77%	65%	12
Georgia	95%	90%	5	92%	81%	11
Minnesota	85%	69%	16	74%	52%	22
Mississippi	83%	75%	8	92%	88%	4
New Jersey	83%	63%	20	76%	46%	30
Tennessee	91%	84%	7	73%	63%	10

Table reads: On the Alaska math exit exam administered in 2005, the overall pass rate for all test-takers was 72%, while the pass rate for students from low-income families (those eligible for free or reduced-price lunches) was 55%—a gap of 17 percentage points.

Source: Center on Education Policy, exit exam survey of state departments of education, June 2006, item 31.

Initial pass rates for English language learners

Table 12 compares initial pass rates for English language learners and all students in the 22 states that provided the Center with pass rate data broken out by subgroups. The size of the gaps varies in English language arts from 17 percentage points in New Mexico to 60 percentage points in New Jersey; and in mathematics from 11 percentage points in Louisiana to 41 percentage points in New Jersey. Mississippi is the only state in which the initial pass rates for ELL students in math surpassed that for all students—by 4 percentage points. In all but two states with exit exams, the disparity in pass rates between ELLs and other students is larger in English language arts than in math, as would be expected (although students' English language proficiency may still affect their ability to understand word problems and vocabulary on math tests).

Table 12

Percentage of English Language Learners Passing State Exit Exams on the First Try, 2005 (except where noted)

State	Reading/English Language Arts			Mathematics		
	ELLs	All Students	Percentage Point Gap	ELLs	All Students	Percentage Point Gap
Alabama ¹	48%	86%	38	65%	78%	13
Alaska	26%	69%	43	43%	72%	29
Arizona	31%	72%	41	34%	67%	33
California	42%	76%	34	49%	74%	25
Florida	10%	52%	42	47%	77%	30
Georgia	68%	95%	27	79%	92%	13
Indiana (2003 rates for class of 2006)	32%	68%	36	44%	64%	20
Louisiana	63%	85%	22	65%	76%	11
Maryland	17%	57%	40	29%	54%	25
Massachusetts	45%	89%	44	55%	85%	30
Minnesota	55%	85%	30	40%	74%	34
Mississippi	59%	83%	24	96%	92%	-4
Nevada ²	58%	91%	33	36%	64%	28
New Jersey	23%	83%	60	35%	76%	41
New Mexico ³	65%	82%	17	68%	83%	15
North Carolina	56%	89%	33	65%	85%	20
Ohio	73%	91%	18	57%	80%	23
South Carolina	54%	86%	32	56%	76%	20
Tennessee	69%	90%	21	60%	73%	13
Texas	34%	87%	53	35%	72%	37
Virginia ⁴	62%	85%	23	80%	84%	4
Washington	29%	73%	44	12%	48%	36

Table reads: In 2006 in Alaska, 26% of English language learners who took the state exit exam passed the English language arts section on the first try, compared with 69% of all students—a 43 percentage point gap. In this same state, 43% of ELL students passed the mathematics section of the exit exam on the first try, compared with 72% of all students—a 29 percentage point gap.

¹ Alabama's pass rates represent the percentage of students passing after spring testing of 11th grade, which would have been their second rather than their first opportunity to take the test; Alabama offers a "pre-graduation" administration of its exit exam in 10th grade. The pass rates shown under the Reading/ELA column are for the reading test only. (Alabama administers a separate language arts test.)

² Nevada's pass rates represent the percentage of students passing after spring testing of 11th grade, which would have been their second rather than first opportunity to take the tests. Nevada first administers the test in spring of 10th grade.

³ The pass rates shown for New Mexico are for the language arts test. The state also gives a reading test.

⁴ Virginia has three end-of-course tests in math. The pass rates included in this table are for Algebra I. In addition, Virginia's pass rates for both reading/ELA and math include students who passed the exam after taking an "expedited retest" (see the state profile.)

Note: The percentage point gap column shows the differences in pass rates between English language learners and all students who took that exit exam. The negative number for Mississippi means that ELLs had a higher pass rate in math than students overall.

Note: In Idaho, ELL students are exempted from testing requirements for 2006 and 2007. Alabama and New York did not provide data on initial pass rates on its survey. Oklahoma has not determined cut scores and therefore was not able to provide 2005 pass rate data.

Source: Center on Education Policy, exit exam survey of state departments of education, June 2006, item 31.

Table 13

Percentage of Students with Disabilities Passing State Exit Exams on the First Try, 2005 (except where noted)

State	Reading/English Language Arts			Mathematics		
	Students with Disabilities	All Students	Percentage Point Gap	Students with Disabilities	All Students	Percentage Point Gap
Alabama ¹	32%	86%	54	24%	78%	54
Alaska	26%	69%	43	28%	72%	44
Arizona	30%	72%	42	23%	67%	44
California	33%	76%	43	30%	74%	44
Florida	17%	52%	35	37%	77%	40
Georgia	69%	95%	26	57%	92%	35
Idaho	45%	90%	45	27%	78%	51
Indiana (2003 rates for class of 2006)	22%	68%	46	25%	64%	39
Louisiana	37%	85%	48	33%	76%	43
Maryland	16%	57%	41	16%	54%	38
Massachusetts	69%	89%	20	61%	85%	24
Minnesota	49%	85%	36	33%	74%	41
Mississippi	42%	83%	41	78%	92%	14
Nevada ²	36%	83%	47	58%	91%	33
New Jersey	75%	83%	8	50%	76%	26
New Mexico	66%	91%	25	51%	79%	28
North Carolina	64%	89%	25	58%	85%	27
Ohio	60%	91%	31	40%	80%	40
South Carolina	44%	86%	42	31%	76%	45
Tennessee	62%	91%	29	39%	73%	34
Texas	58%	87%	29	38%	72%	34
Virginia ³	57%	85%	28	58%	84%	26
Washington	23%	73%	50	6%	48%	42

Table reads: In 2005 in Alaska, 26% of students with disabilities passed the reading part of the high school exit exam on the first try, compared with 69% of all test-takers—a gap in pass rates of 43 percentage points. In the same state, 28% of students with disabilities passed the mathematics part of the exit exam on the first try, compared with 72% of all students—a gap in pass rates of 44 percentage points.

¹ Alabama's pass rates represent the percentage of students passing after spring testing of 11th grade, which would have been their second rather than their first opportunity to take the test; Alabama offers a "pre-graduation" administration of its exit exam in 10th grade. The pass rates shown under the Reading/ELA column are for the reading test only. (Alabama administers a separate language arts test.)

² Nevada's pass rates for the reading and math tests represent the percentage of students passing after spring testing of 11th grade, which would have been their second rather than first opportunity to take the tests. Nevada first administers the test in spring of 10th grade

³ Virginia has three end-of-course tests in math. The pass rates included in this table are for Algebra I. In addition, Virginia's pass rates for both ELA and math include students who passed the exam after taking an "expedited retest" (see the state profile).

Note: The percentage point gap column shows the differences in pass rates between students with disabilities and all students who took the exit exam.

Note: New York is not included in the table because the state did not provide data on initial pass rates in response to our survey. Oklahoma has not yet determined passing scores for its exit exam and therefore was not able to provide 2005 pass rate data.

Source: Center on Education Policy, exit exam survey of state departments of education, June 2006, item 31.

Initial pass rates for students with disabilities

Passing exit exams poses a particular challenge for many students with disabilities. With very few exceptions, students with disabilities had the lowest initial pass rates among all subgroups in the states that reported disaggregated data for 2005. **Table 13** shows the percentage of students with disabilities who passed state exit exams on the first try, compared with the initial pass rates for all students taking the exam.

Initial pass rates for students with disabilities vary considerably among states. In reading, pass rates for this subgroup ranged from 16% in Maryland (which has not yet begun withholding diplomas based on its new exit exam) to 75% in New Jersey; and in math from 6% in Washington (which has not yet begun withholding diplomas) to 78% in Mississippi. Of particular concern are the large gaps that exist between the initial pass rates for students with disabilities and students in general. In all but three of the states shown in table 13, these gaps were at least 25 percentage points in both reading and math, and several states had gaps of 40 percentage points or more in one or the other subject.

We should note, however, that states have very different policies for permitting students with disabilities to take alternative assessments or use accommodations, providing other paths to graduation for these students, and deciding which of these students receive a regular diploma. These policy differences, which are explained more in chapter 5, are likely to affect states' methods for calculating pass rates for students with disabilities, so the differences among states may be at least partly due to factors other than student performance. Nevertheless, states must pay attention to the low pass rates of this subgroup when evaluating the effectiveness of their exit exam systems.

Cumulative Pass Rates

Although initial pass rates often receive extensive media and political attention, what ultimately matters most are cumulative pass rates—the percentage of students who successfully pass the exam by the end of 12th grade, often after multiple retakes. Because many exit exams are still being phased in, these data have only recently begun to be available. Moreover, many states do not have student information systems that allow them to compile this information at the state level.

Cumulative pass rates for all students

Table 14 shows cumulative pass rates from the six states that reported data on our survey for students passing all required sections of their exit exams. New York and North Carolina also provided cumulative pass rate data but for individual subtests only; this information is reported in the profiles for these states. As table 14 illustrates, cumulative pass rates range from 87% in Nevada to 95% in Louisiana. Using the data to determine how many students are denied diplomas due to exit exams is difficult, because some students fail to graduate only because they failed the exam, while others have not met other graduation requirements in addition to failing the exam. Furthermore, many states have come under fire for not including high school dropouts in their calculation of cumulative pass rates.

Cumulative pass rates for subgroups

Among the limited number of states that provided disaggregated data on cumulative pass rates, the gaps in these rates for racial/ethnic subgroups and low-income students are smaller than the gaps in initial pass rates. Why these gaps shrink is a controversial matter. Some critics have suggested that students who do not pass the test drop out of school, while other analysts have proposed that these same data present evidence of the benefit of remediation programs.

Table 14

Overall Cumulative Pass Rates, Class of 2005 (except where noted)

State	All	White	African American	Latino	Asian	Free or reduced-price lunch eligible
Indiana (class of 2006)	89%	92%	66%	70%	89%	75%
Louisiana	95%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Massachusetts	94%	97%	85%	85%	95%	88%
Nevada	87%	94%	87%	86%	93%	NA
Tennessee ¹	90%	93%	80%	89%	95%	82%
Texas	91%	95%	85%	86%	95%	84% ²

Table reads: In Indiana, 89% of all students in the class of 2006 passed the state exit exam by the end of 12th grade. In this same state, 92% of white students, 66% of African American students, 70% of Latino students, 89% of Asian students, and 75% of low-income students passed the exam by the end of 12th grade.

¹ Tennessee reported cumulative pass rates for the cohort of students entering high school in 2001, which is roughly equivalent to the class of 2005.

² Texas breaks out scores for “economically disadvantaged” students rather than students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches.

Note: Cumulative pass rate data for students passing all required sections of an exit exam were not available from other states.

Source: Center on Education Policy, exit exam survey of state departments of education, June 2006, item 32.

Table 15 displays cumulative pass rates for English language learners and students with disabilities from the states that provided disaggregated data on the percentages of students passing all required sections of their exit exams, plus New York and North Carolina. Pass rates for these two subgroups tend to be among the lowest of all subgroups. For ELLs, the cumulative pass rates ranged from 42% in Indiana to 83% in Nevada. For students with disabilities, the pass rates ranged from 21% in Tennessee (69 percentage points below the state’s overall cumulative pass rate) to 87% in Nevada. We do not know the reasons for Nevada’s high pass rates for this subgroup.

The gaps for all subgroups appear to decline between the first test administration and later administrations in states that provided cumulative pass rates. However, we do not know how these states calculated their rates, so the pass rates in the preceding tables may or may not include students who drop out of school without taking advantage of all the opportunities to retake the exam.

Exit Exams and Graduation Rates

As we have reported in the past, the issue of whether exit exams have an impact on high school completion rates is a highly complex one. Researchers who study high school dropouts have tended to agree that dropping out of school is a process rather than an event, and students’ decisions to drop out are affected by things that happen fairly early in their academic careers, such as having to repeat a grade. In one recent study, students reported that the factors that led them to drop out were boredom, attendance, peer pressure, “too much freedom and not enough rules,” and poor grades (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

Table 15

Percentage of English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities Passing State Exit Exams by the End of 12th Grade, 2005 (except where noted)

State	All Students	ELLs	Percentage Point Gap for ELLs	Students with Disabilities (SWDs)	Percentage Point Gap for SWDs
Indiana (2006)	87%	42%	45	53%	36
Massachusetts	94%	72%	22	77%	17
Nevada	87%	83%	4	87%	0
New York	86% (English) 87% (math)	53% (English), 65% (math)	33 (English), 22 (math)	60% (English) 67% (math)	26 (English) 20 (math)
North Carolina ¹	78%	36%	42	42%	36
Tennessee	90%	80%	10	21%	69
Texas	91%	60%	31	60%	31

Table reads: In Massachusetts, 72% of English language learners and 77% of students with disabilities in the class of 2005 had passed all required sections of the state exit exam (in some cases after multiple retakes) by the end of 12th grade, compared with 94% of all students—a gap of 22 percentage points for ELLs and 17 percentage points for students with disabilities.

¹ The pass rates shown for North Carolina are for the Competency Tests of Reading and Math only, so they are not true cumulative pass rates for the entire exit exam. Students must also pass the computer skills test to graduate.

Source: Center on Education Policy, exit exam survey of state departments of education, June 2006, item 32.

Three years ago CEP assembled a group of experts on graduation rates and asked them to review the literature on the impact of exit exams on graduation rates; they concluded that “there was only moderately suggestive evidence of exit exams causing more students to drop out of school,” and that other factors, such as repeating grades, had a greater impact. In 2004 we concluded that policymakers in states introducing exit exams should prepare for possible slight increases in dropout rates, particularly among low-performing and low-income students.

This year, a few new studies were released exploring the relationship between exit exams and graduation rates. A survey done by the Massachusetts Department of Education suggests that exit exams may play a small role in causing students to drop out of school. Two research studies that analyzed national data also found that states with exit exams tend to have slightly lower high school completion rates. These studies and relevant data from a few other states are described below.

MCAS a Factor in Massachusetts, But Not a Major One

Last year, the Commissioner of Education in Massachusetts initiated two studies because the state’s dropout rate rose slightly in 2002-03 and 2003-04, after falling slightly in previous years. In the spring of 2003 the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System became a graduation requirement. The first study described the dropout population, and the second one surveyed superintendents and principals on how to address the problem (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2005; 2006).

The descriptive study found attendance and grade retention (having to repeat a grade) to be key factors. Students who dropped out of Massachusetts schools in 2003-04 missed an average of 31 days of school, versus 10 days for students who stayed in school. About 33% of dropouts had been retained in grade once; another 5% had been retained twice.

The Massachusetts study found that students who do not pass the MCAS also drop out at higher rates. However, many students who drop out do pass the MCAS. In fact, the majority of students who dropped out in 12th grade passed the MCAS. The findings are summarized in **table 16**.

Table 17 cuts the data another way. It shows that dropout rates are higher among students who did not pass the MCAS than among those who did pass.

Tables 16 and 17 suggest that the MCAS has some sort of relationship to dropping out. But the MCAS does not appear to be a major deciding factor in the decision to drop out. The question then becomes: why are students dropping out, and to what extent is the MCAS a factor? What are other factors? To answer these questions, Massachusetts state officials surveyed 105 district superintendents and principals statewide on what they viewed to be the main factors causing students to drop out. The MCAS was not high on the list. The survey was open-ended and the officials could give multiple responses. The results are summarized in **table 18**.

Table 16
Percentage of Massachusetts Students Who Dropped Out and Who Passed or Did Not Pass the MCAS, 2003-04

Grade	Passed MCAS	Did not pass MCAS
11 th grade dropouts	45%	55%
12 th grade dropouts	65%	35%

Table reads: Of the Massachusetts 12th grade students who dropped out of school in 2003-04, 65% passed the MCAS, while 35% did not pass the MCAS.

Source: Massachusetts Department of Education, 2005. Reproduced with permission from the authors.

Table 17
Dropout Rates in Massachusetts by MCAS Competency Determination

Grade	Dropout Rate
11 th grade students who passed MCAS	1.5%
11 th grade students who did not pass MCAS	13.5%
All 11 th grade students	4.0%
12 th grade students who passed MCAS	1.8%
12 th grade students who did not pass MCAS	16.3%
All 12 th grade students	4.8%

Table reads: Among the Massachusetts 11th grade students who did not pass the MCAS, the dropout rate was 13.5%, compared with a dropout rate of 1.5% among the 11th graders who did pass the MCAS.

Source: Massachusetts Department of Education, 2005. Reproduced with permission from the authors.

Table 18

Factors Affecting Dropout Rates, Reported by Massachusetts Principals and Superintendents

Factors causing students to drop out of school	Percentage of respondents
Lack of academic success—failing classes, falling behind on coursework, etc.	46%
Personal and family issues—lack of parent support, disruptive family life, death in the family, education not valued in family, etc.	46%
Economics—full-time employment, students must support families financially, job training, etc.	40%
Frequent truancy—inconsistent and poor attendance	40%
Unknown—respondents stated that they were not aware of the reason(s) students dropped out	36%
GED—students dropped out to obtain a GED	27%
Health issues—illness or mental/emotional health issues	23%
Substance abuse	23%
Court-involved—involvement with the state youth services or incarceration	21%
Disengagement—lack of interest in school	21%
Pregnancy/parenting	21%
Lack of educational alternative—alternative education programs and career and vocational technical education were not available to the students	14%
MCAS—students dropped out after failing part or all of the grade 10 MCAS exam or due to concern that they would be unable to meet state and local requirements for graduation	13%
Mobility—transient, had recently moved into their district	13%
Behavior and disciplinary issues	11%
Evening/night school—students left to attend evening/night school	9%
Grade retention—students were retained in grade either the year they dropped out or in a previous academic year	8%
Language barrier—lack of English language skills	8%
Lack of funding—district lacked funding for special programs to address student needs	7%
Military—students dropped out to join the military	3%
Large high school—high school or class size was too large	3%
Exclusion—suspended from school for disciplinary reasons	2%
Lack of support services	2%
Lack of transportation to and from school	1%

Table reads: Eleven percent of the Massachusetts principals and superintendents surveyed said that behavior and disciplinary issues were a factor in students' decisions to drop out of school.

Source: Massachusetts Department of Education, 2006.

When the district officials were asked what they were doing to address the dropout problem in Massachusetts, the top five responses were creating alternative programs (45%), urging greater connections between adults and students (37%), urging more parental engagement with the students' education (32%), discussing the issue of problem students with teachers (23%), and investigating why students were not attending school (23%). The sixth highest response was increasing MCAS preparation (22%). The respondents said they offered increased academic support for students with low skills in the tested subjects. When the officials were asked what the biggest challenge was in trying to decrease the state's dropout rate, 16% of the respondents said it was increasing student performance so they can pass the MCAS. This was the fifth most common response; funding (50%) and dealing with family issues (28%) were most frequent. Few respondents felt that policy changes were necessary insofar as the MCAS was concerned, however. When asked what the state department of education could do differently, 6% of the respondents said that the role of the MCAS should be reduced, the test could be made shorter, and/or public information on retesting options should be increased.

On the basis of this survey, it appears that the MCAS is a factor in the Massachusetts dropout rate, but not a major one. Local officials see it as a hurdle, but it pales in comparison to other dropout factors such as attendance, family, and work pressures. (Interestingly, these findings somewhat match the responses given by students who had failed the MCAS and were not attending remediation sessions, as described in chapter 2.)

Developments in Other States

Virginia

In October, Governor Mark Warner of Virginia announced that graduation rates had climbed in that state for the class of 2005, the second class required to pass the Standards of Learning tests to graduate. The 2005 rate was 94.6%, compared with 94.2% in 2004. The rate for the class of 2004 was the same as for previous years. The graduation rate also increased for minority students. Some analysts say these official figures are too high and have questioned Virginia's method for calculating its graduation rate. The state plans to initiate a better student tracking system which would follow individual students over time (Helderman, 2005; Commonwealth of Virginia, 2005).

California

HumRRO's yearly evaluation of the CAHSEE will provide a "real time" examination of the impact of the exam, which just began to count for this year's graduating class of 12th graders, who had opportunities to take the exam over the past three years. California's evaluation found that since 1998, there have been substantial decreases in enrollment declines (i.e. students dropping out) between 10th and 11th grade and between 11th and 12th grade. The decline in enrollments in the transition from 9th to 10th grade has been about the same. However, California graduation rates decreased slightly for the classes of 2002-03 and 2003-04 (HumRRO, 2005). Data for the class of 2006 and subsequent classes should provide some indication of the effects of the CAHSEE on the graduation rate.

Other Studies

CEP has followed research studies of whether exit exams affect high school completion rates; reviews of these studies have appeared in our previous reports. We reported that the findings were mixed. Some studies showed a negative impact while others did not. CEP's 2003 report discussed in more depth some of the methodological difficulties and limitations of this research. The main difficulties are in calculating an accurate dropout or graduation rate that is comparable across states, and in isolating the effects of the exit exam on the graduation rate. Since 2004, the small number of new studies on the topic has supported the contention that exit exams do have a negative effect.

Negative relationship between exit exams and graduation rates found

University of Minnesota sociologist John Robert Warren and his colleagues have been continuously updating his research on the relationship between high school exit exams and dropout rates. We reviewed his successive findings in our 2004 report (CEP, 2004). In early research on the topic, Warren and his colleagues found no relationship between exit exams and dropout rates, but later research, which included data from the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey, found an effect that increased with the difficulty of the test and poverty levels.

Warren's team has continued to expand its pool of data. The research team's latest report draws on data from the Census and the Common Core Data (CCD) assembled by the Department of Education, and on data concerning the numbers of people taking the GED exam (Warren, Jenkins & Kulick, 2006). The data span from 1975 to 2002. This study also found that exit exams are associated with lower graduation rates, although the effect is not as drastic as in their 2004 study. Overall, states with exit exams have a high school completion rate that is 1.4 percentage points lower than those without exit exams. The researchers divided exit exams between minimum competency exams and more difficult ones. If an exit exam tested 8th grade level skills, it was considered minimum competency, while a 10th grade level test was considered more difficult. States with minimum competency exams (which few states use anymore) had a graduation rate that was 0.9 percentage points lower than states without exit exams. The graduation rate was 2.1 percentage points lower in states with more difficult exams. There is also a very small increase (0.12 percentage points) in the numbers of students who take the GED in states with more difficult exit exams. In addition, the study found that the negative effects of exit exams on high school completion rates increase in states with higher poverty levels and states that are more ethnically and racially diverse.

A negative effect, with some mixed results

A study by Thomas Dee and Brian Jacob released this year reported a much more varied impact of high school exit exams on high school completion rates, as well as on young people's success in the labor market (Dee & Jacob, 2006). Dee and Jacob used data from the CCD and from the "long form" of the 2000 Census. The Census data contained information on the respondents' age, race and ethnicity, where they received (or did not receive) a diploma, and current employment status. The study found that overall, exit exams reduced the likelihood that students would graduate, particularly African American students. The results were wide ranging:

- Overall, students in states with easier, minimum competency exit exams had a half percentage point reduction in the likelihood of completing high school, compared to students in states without exit exams. The comparable figure was 0.7 percentage points for states with more difficult exams (those covering material introduced in 9th grade and above). This was based on data from the 2000 census; since that time most states have moved away from using minimum competency exams.
- African American male students in states with exit exams had a 1.3 percentage point reduction in the likelihood of completing high school. In states with more difficult exit exams there was a 1.8 percentage point reduction.
- Female students fared better than male students. The likelihood of white females completing high school was unaffected by exit exams, whether the exams were more difficult or not. African American females were unaffected in states with easier exams, but were affected in states with more difficult tests.
- Latino students in exit exam states were slightly more likely to graduate than their counterparts in states without exit exams. Also, Latino females who took a difficult exit exam were more likely to go on to college. However, there were some caveats with the data on this point, such as exemptions and accommodations for English language learners and the fact that the sample only included U.S.-born Latinos.

When the study examined employment status, it produced some complex results. For the overall population, whether a state has an exit exam or not has little effect on students' subsequent earnings. However, Latino females from exit exam states had higher subsequent earnings. In addition, there was a contradictory result for African Americans. Although living in an exit exam state reduced the likelihood of their completing high school, African Americans' overall subsequent earnings were higher than their counterparts in non-exit exam states. The authors noted that some of their findings on minority students were "surprising and puzzling."

To analyze the effects of exit exams in more detail, Dee and Jacob looked at the state of Minnesota at the inception of its Basic Skills Test (BST), comparing students who did not have to pass the test with those who did. The researchers found that the introduction of the BST did not have a significant effect on the overall dropout rate. For 10th and 11th graders, the introduction of the BST slightly reduced the dropout rate overall, by about 0.3 percentage points. For 12th graders, the dropout rate increased. In suburban, low-poverty districts the overall dropout rate decreased, but it increased in urban, higher-poverty districts with larger concentrations of minority students.

Use of Exit Exam Results by Universities and Colleges

College Admissions

Last year, three states (Alabama, New York, and Texas) reported that some of their public universities and community colleges use exit exams for admissions purposes. The addition of Washington this year brings the total to four states. This relatively small number is not surprising in light of previous findings by the Center that high school exit exams are not meant to be college readiness examinations (Center on Education Policy, 2004).

In all four of these states, the use of exit exams for higher education admissions is not systemwide but very limited. In years to come, it will be interesting to see whether this flexibility to decide at the individual institution level is replaced with a systemwide requirement. Our Oklahoma survey respondent reported that the state is considering using two of its end-of-course exit exams for undergraduate admissions, but currently no policy has been established.

Just because a state's public universities and community colleges do not use exit exams for admissions does not mean that exit exams have no impact on students' attendance at a university or college. Several of our survey respondents pointed out that admittance to their state universities and colleges is dependent on having either a diploma or a GED. Therefore, while passing an exit exam does not directly help with college admissions in many states, *not* passing an exit exam can affect whether a student may enter a public post-secondary institution directly after high school. If a student has not passed the exit examination, he or she may need to obtain a GED, delaying entry to college.

Although our survey did not ask states whether students may be admitted to any of their public colleges and universities without a high school diploma, a few states, such as California and New Mexico, noted that this was the case. However, students are not eligible for federal financial aid without a diploma or GED, so attending college may be beyond the reach of students financially, if not academically, if they don't meet these criteria.

College Financial Aid

This year's survey did not directly ask if exit exam results are used to award scholarships or other financial incentives to students, but three states volunteered this information. As in previous years, Arizona, Massachusetts, and Nevada mentioned state scholarships or full tuition waivers that are tied to performance on their exit exams. More details about these scholarships are included in the profiles for these states at the end of this report.

Conclusion

Exit exams seem to have some positive effects on curriculum and instruction. State officials report that districts are more closely aligning instruction with state content standards, and that students are receiving more instruction in tested subjects—typically mathematics, reading, writing, and science. However, this increased focus comes with a price because it leaves less time for non-tested subjects. And although state officials reported these effects, it is difficult to disentangle whether changes in curriculum and instruction are mostly due to exit exams, NCLB, or other state efforts to reform curriculum and instruction.

Our data on initial and cumulative pass rates on exit exams show wide variations among states and between subgroups. In some states, racial/ethnic minority groups or low-income students have improved their rates of passing exit exams on the first attempt, which offers reason for cautious optimism. But other states do not show improvement in initial pass rates for these subgroups. Moreover, achievement gaps in pass rates persist in all states for minority and low-income students and are markedly low for English language learners and students with disabilities. In addition, it is not clear how much annual pass rates are affected by changes in state policy that may create additional ways for students to meet exit exam requirements.

In the states that reported cumulative pass rates on exit exams, these rates range from 87% to 95%. These figures should be treated with caution for several reasons. First, most states with exit exams did not provide cumulative pass rate data, even when their exams have been in effect long enough that this information could be available. Second, cumulative pass rate data may not take into account students who dropped out before the final test administration. Third, distressing gaps in cumulative pass rates exist for students of color, low-income students, English language learners, and students with disabilities. Together, these factors suggest that significant percentages of students—especially minority, low-income, and special needs students—are not passing exit exams and are therefore at greater risk of not graduating with a regular diploma or at all. States should not declare that their exit exam systems are successful without knowing more accurately what happens to students and being willing to report these outcomes and without making concerted efforts to raise pass rates among subgroups.

Academic studies suggest that exit exams do slightly increase dropout rates, particularly for at-risk and low-income students and some minority students. But caution is still in order in interpreting these findings, for the following reasons:

- Studies on this issue have arrived at widely varying findings. Although more recent studies are showing a relationship between exit exams and dropout rates, the results vary, even in studies by the same authors. As we have previously written, scholars differ over what methodology to use and how to best calculate graduation rates. Some studies show more of an effect than others, and still others show variations among states, depending on the difficulty of the exam, the state's racial and ethnic diversity, income levels, and other factors.
- In some states, the introduction of exit exams, or an increase in their level of difficulty, is part of a larger effort to raise standards and increase academic rigor. The graduation rate may decrease slightly because more is expected of students in high school in general, including passing an exit exam.
- While exit exams may have an effect on a student's decision to drop out, other considerations may loom larger, such as attendance, boredom, family issues, and economic pressures. Low attendance and grade retention are strongly associated with dropping out. Research shows that dropping out of high school is the result of a long process of detachment rather than the result of a single factor, like an exit exam.

In conclusion, policymakers in states introducing exit exams should prepare for a possible slight increase in the dropout rate, particularly among at-risk youth. Still, the variation among states indicates that an increase in the dropout rate is not a foregone conclusion. In addition, policymakers should also keep close watch on academic studies (to see if more of a consensus emerges) and pay attention to studies that will be conducted over the next few years by states like California, Virginia, and Massachusetts that have made a particular commitment to closely monitor graduation rates as they implement exit exams.

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Chapter 4: Test Characteristics, Development, and Use

Key Findings

- States continue to move away from minimum competency exams and toward standards-based or end-of-course exams. At the same time, states are expanding the range of subjects tested. By 2012, three-fourths of the states with exit exams will test in science and half will test in social studies, in addition to assessing English language arts and mathematics as all exit exam states do now.
- Multiple-choice questions continue to be the most common type of question on exit exams, although just three states rely solely on this format. Sixteen states with exit exams ask students to produce a short essay or similar piece of writing. Fewer states use short-answer or other extended-response questions. The types of questions states use may affect student performance because not all students excel at demonstrating knowledge the same way. Question formats can also affect instruction—for example, teachers may give less emphasis to knowledge and skills that are not well measured by multiple-choice or short-answer questions.
- All states with exit exams rely to some extent on outside contractors for test development, scoring, reporting, or other test-related work. The pool of test contractors is relatively small: just three contractors serve more than half the states with current or planned exit exams, and 11 contractors serve all 25 exit exam states.
- Twenty-one out of 25 states with current or planned exit exams reported that their exams have undergone some form of evaluation. These evaluations vary in purpose and sophistication, ranging from internal reviews of the technical aspects of the tests to full-fledged evaluations by outside experts.
- Twenty out of 25 states with current or planned exit exams use or plan to use their exit exams to fulfill the high school testing requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act. But eight of these states use different passing scores for awarding high school diplomas than for determining proficiency under NCLB—and seven of the eight said that scores required for awarding diplomas are lower than those used to determine proficiency under NCLB.
- Fifteen out of 25 states with current or planned exit exams do not require either home-schooled or private school students to take exit exams. In states that do have exit exam policies for home-schooled or private school students, often the exams apply only to a small or very specific subset of students, such as those who seek a state-endorsed diploma or those in state-accredited private schools.

The choices states make about the design and nature of their exit exams can affect how teachers prepare students for them, how the public perceives them, and how well students do on them. For example, the decision to have a minimum competency exam geared to 8th grade academic standards instead of end-of-course exams geared to the content of specific high school courses can influence both curriculum and students' pass rates. Decisions about which subjects to test and whether to include open-response questions that require students to write an essay or develop their own answer can affect which subjects and skills teachers emphasize. The decision to have a lower cut score for awarding diplomas than for defining what constitutes "proficient" performance under the federal No Child Left Behind Act can shape the public's perception about the state's expectations for a diploma.

This chapter, which is based on findings from our 2006 state survey, describes the main characteristics of state high school exit exams, including types of exams, subjects tested, and types of test questions. It also looks at two specific aspects of test development: which contractors are used by states to help design and implement exit exams, and how many state exit exams have undergone evaluations. Another section reports on how many states are using their exit exams to meet the high school testing requirements of NCLB and whether they use the same cut scores for both graduation and NCLB purposes. A final section describes state decisions about whether and when to apply exit exam requirements to home-schooled and private school students.

Types of Exams

As in past years, the Center has grouped state exit exams into three categories, based on states' own descriptions of their tests:

- **Minimum competency exams**, which generally focus on basic skills below the high school level
- **Standards-based exams**, which are aligned with state standards and are generally targeted at the high school level
- **End-of-course exams**, which assess whether students have mastered the content of specific high school courses; these exams are usually standards-based, and students take each test after completing a specific course

Although most states' exit exams fit clearly into one of these categories, the categories are not rigid. A Minnesota official noted in our survey, for example, that the state considers its new Graduation Required Assessments for Diploma (GRAD) tests to be minimum competency exams, even though the reading test is aligned to 10th grade standards and the math test to 11th grade standards. Tennessee's Gateway Examinations, like the end-of-course exams in other states, are also standards-based because they have been designed to reflect the state's content standards. North Carolina refers to its exam as a standards-based exam because it is aligned to state standards, even though it is aligned to 8th grade standards, which are below the high school level.

This year, 15 of the 22 states with fully implemented exit exams are using standards-based exams, and 4 are using end-of-course exams. Only 3 states are administering minimum competency exams—down from the 10 states that used this type of exam in 2002.

Figure 2 illustrates the shift away from minimum competency exit exams and toward standards-based and end-of-course exams—a trend that has been going on for four years and is expected to continue into the future, according to our past and most recent surveys. By 2012, only 2 states will still be using minimum competency exams, while 17 will be using standards-based exams, and 7 will be using end-of-course exams (including North Carolina, with its dual exam system).

A common question often raised by legislators, parents, and even many educators about all types of exit exams is why states go to the trouble of developing their own high school tests when the SAT and ACT college entrance exams are available and widely used by millions of students. **Box 4** examines some of the reasons why these college admissions tests are not used in place of exit exams.

Figure 2

Types of Exit Exams States Are Using or Plan to Use

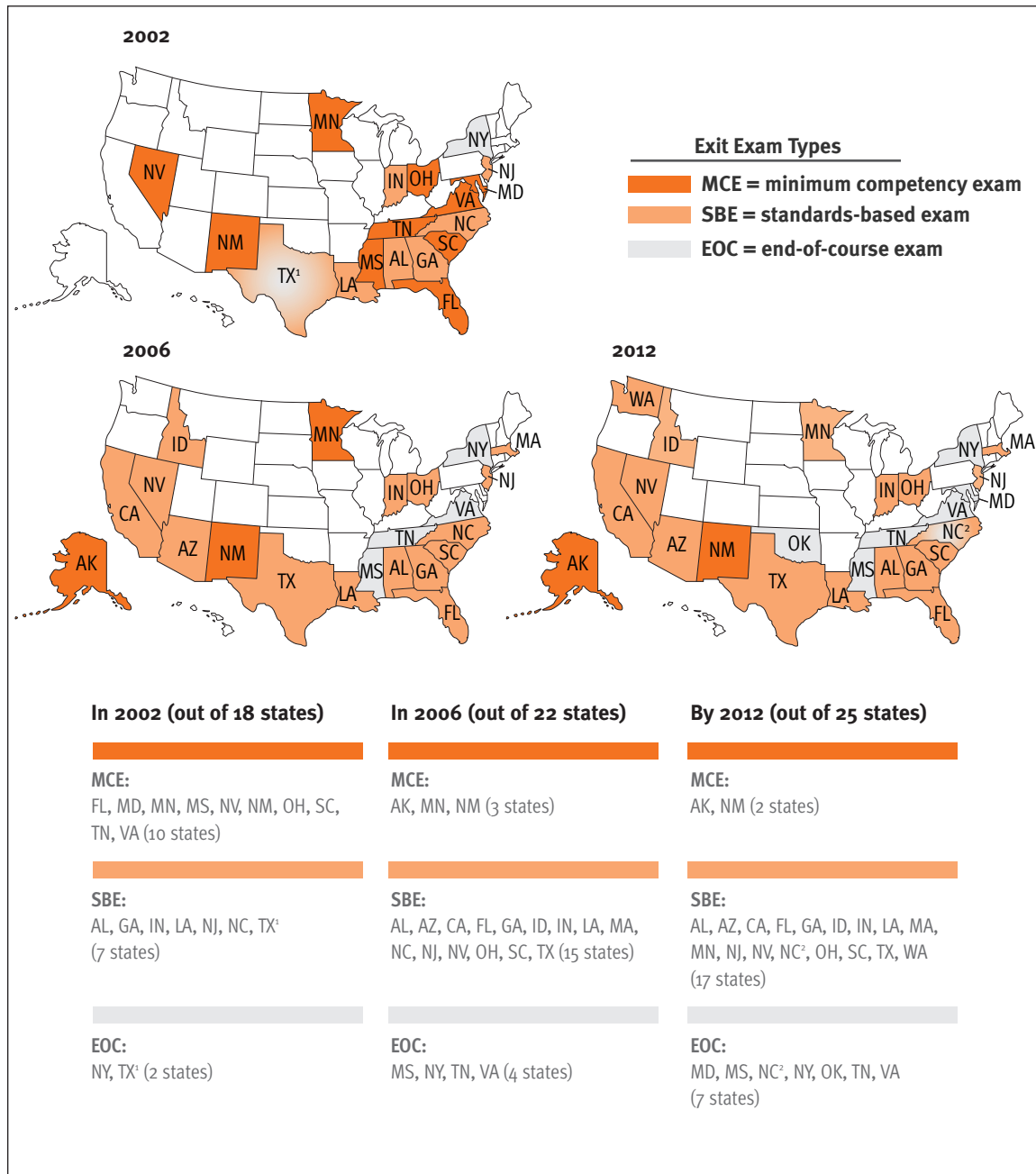


Figure reads: In 2002, 10 of the 18 states with fully implemented exit exams, including Florida, used minimum competency exams, while 7 states, including Alabama, used standards-based exams, and 2 states, including New York, used end-of-course exams. By 2012, only 2 of the 25 states with mandatory exit exams will use minimum competency exams, while 17 will use standards-based exams, and 7 will use end-of-course exams.

¹ In 2002, Texas gave students the option to pass either an SBE or an EOC exam.

² As of 2010, North Carolina will require students to pass its existing standards-based exam plus five new end-of-course exams in order to graduate.

Source: Center on Education Policy, exit exam surveys of state departments of education, June 2006, and July 2002.

At first glance, using a college entrance exam such as the SAT or ACT as an exit exam does seem reasonable, even efficient. Many students already take one of these examinations, so they could take fewer exams if the SAT or ACT was used as an exit exam. Taking a college entrance exam might encourage more students to apply to college, which is also a worthwhile goal.

Several states already require all high school students to take either the SAT or ACT. All high school students in Colorado, Illinois, and Michigan take the ACT; in Maine, all take the SAT. However, none of these states has an exit exam or uses these tests for exit exam purposes.

Why don't states use the SAT or ACT as an exit exam? There are several good reasons:

- The SAT and ACT were designed to measure college readiness. College readiness might be too high of a standard to determine whether or not a student should graduate from high school. These tests might also intimidate students for whom postsecondary education is not a goal.
- The SAT and ACT were not designed to be aligned to state content standards, which are intended to cover the knowledge and skills that a state considers the most valuable for students to learn and teachers to teach. This lack of alignment casts doubt on whether the SAT or ACT is a good measure of what students have learned in high school.
- These tests are limited to math and English, although the ACT has a general science test. Even though these college entrance exams have recently added writing tests, they do not accommodate performance tasks that are currently included in some state exit exams.
- Instructional time that would otherwise be used to teach subject matter knowledge and skills would likely be spent teaching SAT or ACT test-taking skills.

States recognize these limitations and sometimes allow SAT or ACT scores to substitute for passing an exit exam. This option is meant to protect students who might not test well on the state's exit exam but who clearly should graduate from high school. Ultimately, the broad use of the SAT or ACT as an exit exam simply poses too many problems, may not be a valid measure of what students have learned in high school, and undermines state standards. However, these issues may not deter states from implementing one of these tests, if not as a complete substitute for a current exit exam then as an alternative under certain circumstances.

Source: Center on Education Policy, 2006.

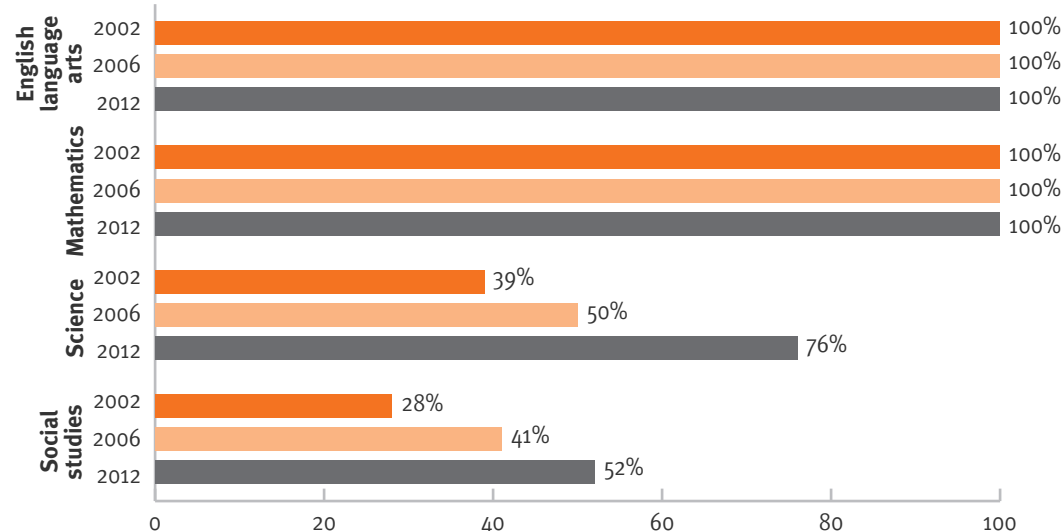
Subjects Tested

All states with mandatory exit exams assess students in English language arts and mathematics, but more states are adding tests in science and social studies. Idaho added a science component to its exit exam this year, according to our survey. Massachusetts, North Carolina, and South Carolina reported that they will add a science test to their exit exams in 2010, joining the three states that had already planned to assess science in the future. The move toward science testing may be related to requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act, which calls on states to begin testing students in science by school year 2007-08. North Carolina and South Carolina also plan to add a social studies component to their exit exams in 2010. Science and social studies will be included in Oklahoma's end-of course exams, which are slated to become a graduation requirement in 2012.

By 2012, all 25 states with mandatory exit exams will continue to assess English language arts and mathematics. In addition, 19 of these states will test science and 13 will test social studies—a higher percentage than in the past, as shown in **figure 3**.

Figure 3

Percentage of States with Exit Exams Testing Specific Subjects

**2002 (out of 18 states)****English language arts**

AL, FL, GA, IN, LA, MD, MN, MS, NV, NJ, NM, NY, NC, OH, SC, TN, TX, VA (18 states)

Mathematics

All 18 states

Science

AL, GA, NM, NY, OH, TN, TX (7 states)

Social studies

GA, NM, NY, OH, TX (5 states)

Computer skills¹

NC (1 state)

2006 (out of 22 states)**English language arts**

AL, AK, AZ, CA, FL, GA, ID, IN, LA, MA, MN, MS, NV, NJ, NM, NY, NC, OH, SC, TN, TX, VA (22 states)

Mathematics

All 22 states

Science

AL, GA, ID, LA, MS, NM, NY, OH, TN, TX, VA (11 states)

Social studies

AL, GA, LA, MS, NM, NY, OH, TX, VA (9 states)

Computer skills¹

NC (1 state)

Foreign language¹

NY (1 state)

2012 (out of 25 states)**English language arts**

AL, AK, AZ, CA, FL, GA, ID, IN, LA, MD, MA, MN, MS, NV, NJ, NM, NY, NC, OH, OK, SC, TN, TX, VA, WA (25 states)

Mathematics

All 25 states

Science

AL, GA, ID, LA, MD, MA, MS, NV, NJ, NM, NY, NC, OH, OK, SC, TN, TX, VA, WA (19 states)

Social studies

AL, GA, LA, MD, MS, NM, NY, NC², OH, OK, SC, TX, VA (13 states)

Computer skills¹

NC (1 state)

Foreign language¹

NY (1 state)

Figure reads: In 2006, 50% of the states with mandatory exit exams, including Alabama and 10 other states, required students to pass a science test to graduate—an increase over the 39% of exit exam states that required science testing in 2002. By 2012, 76% of states with mandatory exit exams, including Maryland and 18 other states, expect to include a science test.

¹These subjects are not included in the percentages in the graph because each subject has been used in only one state. Dividing one by the growing number of states using exit exams would make it seem as though there is a decline in the use of these assessments.

²North Carolina has a mandatory test in civics and economics, which is grouped in the social studies category in this table.

Source: Center on Education Policy, exit exam surveys of state departments of education, June 2006, and July 2002.

Types of Test Questions

The types of questions states choose to use may impact student performance because not all students can readily demonstrate knowledge in the same way. In addition, not all types of skills and knowledge are best assessed with the same types of test questions. For these reasons, most states include at least two types of questions in their exams. Multiple-choice questions remain the predominant format by far, but 22 of the 25 states with current or planned exit exams also include at least one other type of test question—most often writing prompts that ask students to write an essay or other piece.

States made very few changes during the past year to the types of questions used on their exit exams. In 2006, Idaho joined Alabama and Tennessee to become one of three states relying solely on multiple-choice questions in their exit exams. Nine states used one other type of question in addition to multiple-choice, as shown in **table 19**. Six states used three types of questions. Four states used four types of questions (multiple-choice, writing prompt, short-answer, and other extended-response).

When Washington (2008) begins withholding diplomas based on students' exit exam performance, it will use all four types of questions. Maryland (2009) will use three types of questions, and Oklahoma (2012) will only use multiple-choice questions and writing prompts.

State Contractors for Exit Exams

This year's survey for the first time asked states to identify whether they used an outside contractor to develop or implement their exit exam. Twenty-four of the 25 states with current or planned exit exams used contractors for some tasks; these states listed 11 different contractors. The state profiles at the end of this report show which states are using which contractors. The three most popular contractors served over half of the states with current or planned exit exams. The following contractors were cited most often:

- Pearson Educational Measurement (six states)
- CTB/McGraw Hill (five states)
- Data Recognition Corporation (four states)
- Harcourt Assessment Inc. (three states)
- Measurement Incorporated (two states)
- Educational Testing Service (two states)
- Measured Progress (two states)

Four other contractors—Georgia Center for Assessment, Northwest Evaluation Association, North Carolina State University, and American Institutes for Research—were used by one state. New York had no contractor as of June 2006.

The numbers of states listed above total more than 25 because three states work with multiple contractors. Florida contracts with Harcourt Assessment, Inc. for test development and with CTB/McGraw Hill for test administration, scoring, and reporting. Georgia uses three contractors: Data Recognition Corporation for test development, Georgia Center for Assessment for scoring and reporting, and Pearson Educational Measurement for printing. In 2005–06, Virginia contracted with both Harcourt Assessment and Pearson.

Table 19

Types of Questions on Exit Exams, 2006

State	Multiple-Choice	Writing Prompt	Short-Answer	Other Extended-Response
Alabama	✓			
Alaska	✓	✓	✓	
Arizona	✓	✓		
California	✓	✓		
Florida	✓		✓	✓
Georgia	✓	✓		
Idaho	✓			
Indiana	✓	✓	✓	
Louisiana	✓	✓	✓	
Maryland ^a	✓	✓	✓	
Massachusetts	✓	✓	✓	✓
Minnesota	✓	✓		
Mississippi	✓	✓		
Nevada	✓	✓		
New Jersey	✓	✓	✓	
New Mexico	✓	✓	✓	✓
New York	✓	✓	✓	✓
North Carolina	✓			✓
Ohio	✓	✓	✓	✓
Oklahoma ^a	✓	✓		
South Carolina	✓			✓
Tennessee	✓			
Texas	✓	✓	✓	
Virginia	✓	✓		
Washington ^a	✓	✓	✓	✓

Table reads: In 2006 Alabama relied solely on multiple-choice questions for its exit exams. Alaska used three types of questions (multiple-choice, writing prompt, and short-answer), while Massachusetts used four types of questions (multiple-choice, writing prompt, short-answer, and other extended-response).

^a Maryland, Oklahoma, and Washington are not currently withholding diplomas. Washington will begin withholding diplomas in 2008, Maryland in 2009, and Oklahoma in 2012.

Source: Center on Education Policy, exit exam survey of state departments of education, June 2006, item 7.

Evaluations of Exit Exams

Nearly all of the states with current or planned exit exams reported that their exit exams have undergone an evaluation, although not all states elaborated on the types of evaluation that had been done. The responses from states that did elaborate suggest that evaluations of exit exams vary widely in scope and sophistication. **Table 20** groups into broad categories the different types of evaluations states reported on our survey.

Some evaluations were done by the state education department or its consultants (classified in table 20 as internal), while others were conducted by an independent group (classified as external).

Several evaluations, both internal and external, studied the technical aspects of the tests, such as whether the tests meet professional standards of validity and reliability. Often evaluations focused on one important aspect of test validity—how well the tests are aligned with curriculum and instruction in the state. Several states noted that Achieve, Inc., an organization that advises states on their academic standards and assessments, has done an independent analysis of their state’s exam systems for alignment, rigor, and other qualities.

Some states reported that their broader assessment systems had undergone the peer review process initiated by the U.S. Department of Education as part of its oversight of the No Child Left Behind Act. Two state exit exams have been the subject of broad external evaluations, including HumRRO’s state-mandated evaluation of the California exit exam and an SRI International study of Washington’s exit exam that looked at student performance and content alignment.

Only four states reported that their exit exams had not undergone an evaluation. Oklahoma’s exit exam system is still being developed; the state survey respondent said that in the future the exams will be reviewed, realigned, and recalibrated as necessary. Oklahoma will compare its test content and student test performance with those of other states. Minnesota and Tennessee officials said their states’ exams had not been evaluated and provided no further information.

Table 20

Types of Evaluations of State Exit Exams

Type of evaluation	States that reported having undergone this type of evaluation
Internal review of test items or technical testing issues (reliability, validity)	MA, NM, NY
Internal alignment review	AL, LA, NY, MA ¹
External alignment study	AZ, GA, MS, NV, MA ¹
External review of alignment, reliability, validity	ID
External review by Achieve, Inc. of alignment, rigor, or other issues	FL, IN, MD, MA, NJ, OH ² , TX
U.S. Department of Education peer review of state assessment system	OH, SC
Broad external evaluation of several aspects of exit exam	CA, WA

Table reads: Massachusetts, Nevada, and New York reported that they have done internal reviews of the text items or technical aspects of their exit exams.

Note: As described on the state Web sites mentioned in their state surveys, New York and Massachusetts have conducted more than one type of evaluation of their exit exams.

¹ This information was obtained through a communication with a state official.

² Ohio did not report the Achieve, Inc. external review as did other states, but the study *Do Graduation Tests Measure Up? A Closer Look at State High School Exams* (June 2004) lists Ohio as one of the participating states in the Achieve study.

Source: Center on Education Policy, exit exam survey of state departments of education, June 2006.

Using Exit Exams to Meet NCLB Requirements

Although the federal No Child Left Behind Act requires students to be tested at least once during grades 10–12 in reading and math (and soon in science), it does not mandate that these high school tests be exit exams. In actual practice, however, the majority of states with current or planned exit exams already use or intend to use their exit exams to fulfill NCLB testing requirements, according to our surveys. This practice helps to save resources, cut down on the amount of testing, and create a more cohesive and integrated testing system.

As shown in **table 21**, 20 states reported this year that they are using exit exams for NCLB accountability. Although this is the same number of states that last year reported that they used or intend to use exit exams for NCLB, two major changes have occurred. As of 2005–06, Alaska no longer uses its exit exam for NCLB purposes. Instead, it has adopted the Grade 10 Standards Based Assessment for NCLB, while continuing to use the Alaska High School Graduation Qualification Exam (AHSGQE) as a graduation requirement. The state survey respondent explained that the change was made to better fulfill the requirements of NCLB, since the AHSGQE assesses essential skills and not exclusively grade 10 standards. Even with this change, the number of states using exit exams for NCLB purposes remained the same as last year because of the addition of Oklahoma, which adopted its exit exam policy in 2005 and was not included in last year's total. Oklahoma currently uses its Algebra I and English II end-of-course exams for NCLB purposes and plans to continue doing so after the EOI exams become a graduation requirement for the class of 2012.

Five states do not use their exit exams for NCLB accountability, but for one of these states, Minnesota, this situation will change in a few years. Minnesota does not use its current exit exam, which is aligned mostly to the 8th grade level, for NCLB, but the state is phasing in a new exam that it plans to use to meet NCLB requirements. The other four states use different exams for NCLB and did not report any intention to change this in future years.

Eight states continue to use different cut scores for awarding high school diplomas than for determining what constitutes “proficient” performance under NCLB, as shown in table 21. Of these states, seven reported that their passing scores for awarding diplomas are lower than the scores used to define proficient performance for NCLB. California, for example, set its NCLB definition of proficiency at a 380 scaled score for both English language arts and math—higher than the exit exam passing score of 350 for each subject. States may do this in an attempt to ensure a higher passing rate and prevent public opposition to the use of the exams. Idaho also uses lower cut scores for graduation purposes than for NCLB, but this will change in 2008, when Idaho raises its graduation cut scores to what the state considers a 10th grade level of performance—the same score currently used to define proficient performance under NCLB.

Minnesota is taking a unique approach to setting cut scores on its new MCA-II reading and mathematics tests for NCLB and graduation purposes. When the state begins administering these tests in 2008 and 2009, it will use the NCLB cut score to award diplomas to all students who pass on the first try. For students who do not pass on the first try, however, the state will look at their performance on a subset of test items that taken together are less rigorous than the full test—a subset that forms what the state refers to as the GRAD test. Students who pass the subset of items that make up the GRAD test will be considered to have passed for graduation purposes.

Georgia's response to our survey question about NCLB cut scores did not clearly identify whether the graduation passing score is higher or lower than the NCLB cut score. The state reported that it has enhanced its exit exam by adding items to better address the depth and breadth of the curriculum for accountability purposes. The enhanced test has two additional cut scores for the “proficient” and “advanced” levels under NCLB, but the state asserted that the new performance levels do not affect a student's chance of earning a diploma.

Table 21

State Policies for Using Exit Exams for NCLB Accountability

State	Exit Exam Used for NCLB Accountability	Year First Used for NCLB	Same Cut Score Used for Awarding Diploma and for Defining “Proficient” under NCLB
Alabama	Yes	2003-04	Yes
Alaska	No	NA	NA
Arizona	Yes	2001-02	Yes
California	Yes	2002-03	No
Florida	Yes	2002-03	No
Georgia	Yes	2003-04	No
Idaho	Yes	2002-03	No
Indiana	Yes	2002-03	Yes
Louisiana	Yes	2002-03	No
Maryland	Yes	2004-05	Yes
Massachusetts	Yes	2002-03	No
Minnesota	No	NA	NA
Mississippi	Yes	2002-03	No
Nevada	Yes	2003-04	Yes
New Jersey	Yes	2003-04	Yes
New Mexico	No	NA	NA
New York	Yes	2002-03	Yes
North Carolina	No	NA	NA
Ohio	Yes	2003-04	Yes
Oklahoma	Yes	2002-03	To be determined
South Carolina	Yes	2003-04	No
Tennessee	Yes	2002-03	Yes
Texas	No	NA	NA
Virginia	Yes	2002-03	Yes
Washington	Yes	2002-03	Yes in 2008

NA = Not applicable

Table reads: In Alabama, the state exit exam is used for accountability under the No Child Left Behind Act and was first used for this purpose in 2003-04. The state uses the same cut score to award diplomas as to determine NCLB proficiency.

Source: Center on Education Policy, exit exam survey of state departments of education, June 2006, item 30.

Home-Schooled and Private School Students

As in 2005, the majority of states with exit exams do not require home-schooled or private school students to take or pass these exams. In states that do apply exit exams to home-schooled or private school students, the requirement is often limited to specific students or situations, and the policies are often different for home-schooled students than for private school students.

As shown in **table 22**, eight states make exit exams a requirement or option for at least a subset of home-schooled students. Only three of these states—North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee—require all home-schooled students to pass exit exams to graduate. Four other states require home-schooled students to pass exit exams only if they are enrolled in public schools or are working toward a state-accredited diploma. Nevada has a unique policy that requires home-schooled—as well as private school—students to take the exit exam only if they want to be eligible for the state’s Millennium scholarship program.

Table 22 States with Exit Exam Policies for Home-Schooled and Private School Students		
State	Is exit exam required for home-schooled students?	Is exit exam required for private school students?
California	Only for students earning a public high school diploma	No (private school students are not eligible to take the exam)
Idaho	In some circumstances	Only for private schools seeking state-accreditation
Indiana	Only for home-schooled students enrolled in public school	Only for students in accredited private schools or those also enrolled in public school
Louisiana	No	Yes for students in approved private schools that have same graduation requirements as public schools and grant a standard Louisiana diploma
Nevada	Only for students who want to be eligible for the Nevada Millennium Scholarship Program	Only for students who want to be eligible for the Nevada Millennium Scholarship Program
New York	No	Yes for students in accredited private schools
North Carolina	Yes	Yes
Ohio	Only for students seeking a diploma with the state seal	Only for students in chartered private schools or private school students who seek a state diploma with the state seal
South Carolina	Yes	Only students placed in private schools by school districts or other public agencies
Tennessee	Yes	Yes for accredited private schools with the same diploma requirements as public schools
Number of states with exit exam requirements for at least some students in category	8	9

Table reads: In California, only home-schooled students who seek to earn a public high school diploma must pass the state high school exit exam, while private school students are not eligible to take the exam.

Note: Of the 25 states with current or planned exit exams, those not listed in this table reported that there are no exit exam requirements for home-schooled students or students in private schools.

Source: Center on Education Policy, exit exam survey of state departments of education, June 2006, item 15.

Nine states make exit exams a requirement or option for at least some private school students. North Carolina is the only state that requires all private school students to take exit exams. Five states (Idaho, Indiana, New York, Ohio, and Tennessee) require exit exams only for students in state-accredited or chartered private schools. In Louisiana, the exit exam is optional for approved private schools that have the same graduation requirements as public schools and are eligible to grant a standard Louisiana diploma.

A few states that had reported no specific policies for home-schooled or private school students in our survey last year did report requirements for one or both groups in our survey this year:

- Tennessee added a requirement for all home-schooled students to take its exit exam.
- Indiana specified that home-schooled students who are officially enrolled in public schools must take the exit exam.
- Idaho noted that in some circumstances, home-schooled students must take its exam but did not specify the circumstances.
- California reported that home-schooled students must pass the CAHSEE only if they seek to earn a public school diploma, while private school students are not eligible to take the CAHSEE.
- South Carolina indicated that students placed in private schools by public school districts or other public agencies are required to take its exit exam.

Conclusion


The characteristics of a state's exit exam can influence public perceptions and opinions of the exam as well as the strategies teachers use to prepare students, the content taught, and student performance on the exam. In the five years that the Center has been tracking the development of exit exams, some noteworthy changes have occurred.

In an attempt to raise expectations for what high school students should know and be able to do, states have moved away from minimum competency exams typically aligned to basic skills below the high school level and toward standards-based or end-of-course exams generally aligned to high school standards or specific high school courses. States have also expanded the range of subjects assessed in the exams beyond English language arts and mathematics. Science and social studies are currently assessed by 11 and 9 states respectively. Furthermore, states continue to rely on various types of questions that may require students to develop different skills.

Despite these efforts to make exit exams more rigorous, the meaning of achieving the passing scores required for graduation is still questionable. Achieving a passing score does not necessarily mean that a student is ready for the rigors of postsecondary education. Most state tests are aligned to 10th grade standards or lower. In fact, readiness for postsecondary education may be too high of an expectation for high school exit exams, which is one reason why college entrance exams like the SAT and ACT are not currently used as exit exams. Furthermore, 7 of the 20 states that currently use the same exams to fulfill the high school testing requirements of NCLB report that the scores required for graduation purposes are lower than those used to define "proficient" under NCLB.

It is important for the public to understand that the development and implementation of these high-stakes tests is a complicated process involving contractors outside state departments of education. In fact, three contractors—Pearson Educational Measurement, CTB/McGraw Hill, and Data Recognition Corporation—serve more than half the states with current or planned exit exams. These contractors not only help to develop the exams, but are also involved in printing, administering, scoring, and reporting. On one hand, these contractors can add their technical expertise to the process. On the other hand, the reliance on contractors may mean that some decisions about exit exams are determined behind the scenes.

Furthermore, evaluating the validity and reliability of these exams is also an important and complicated process that often involves external evaluations. These evaluations vary in scope and sophistication and often focus on alignment between the exams and the states' curriculum and instruction. Some states have undergone broader external evaluations of several aspects of their exit exams.



Chapter 5:

Student Options for Meeting Graduation Requirements

Key Findings

- All 25 states with current or planned exit exams allow students who do not pass the exam on the first try to retake it before the end of 12th grade, and 24 states allow students to retake their exams after completing 12th grade. States vary greatly, however, in the number of retest opportunities they permit.
- The number of states that accept scores on other states' tests for transfer students nearly doubled in the past year but remains small. The practice of not accepting other states' tests scores can cause challenges for students who transfer late in their high school years. Still, state content standards and tests vary so much that accepting scores from other states' tests could undercut the original purpose of exit exams, which is to certify that all graduates in a particular state have met that state's standards.
- States continue to offer a variety of options for general education students who are struggling to pass exit exams. This year, 16 of the 25 states with current or planned exit exams offer some type of alternate path to earning a diploma—either through alternative evaluation methods, alternative or substitute tests, a waiver or appeals process, or test accommodations for general education students. In addition, eight states grant alternative diplomas or certificates to general education students who do not pass their exit exams. Over the past year, at least three states—Arizona, Washington, and Maryland—have expanded their alternate paths for obtaining a diploma.
- All states have some type of alternate path to help students with disabilities meet graduation requirements. The most common options are special diplomas or certificates in 17 states; alternative or substitute assessments in 10 states; and a waiver, appeals process, or other special evaluation method in 11 states. There is a growing trend toward adding more alternate paths or even exempting students with disabilities from exam requirements; eight states provide exemptions or delays in certain circumstances. However, state policies vary as to whether students who fulfill graduation requirements through these alternate paths earn a regular high school diploma.
- Despite large gaps in pass rates between students who are English language learners and other students, only 4 of the 25 states with current or planned exit exams offer alternate paths to graduation that specifically address the needs of ELLs.
- All states with exit exams allow English language learners and students with disabilities to take the exams with test accommodations. These accommodations mainly involve changes in test setting, timing or scheduling, presentation of test material or directions, modes for students' responses, and use of special equipment or materials. The specific accommodations permitted tend to be similar among states and have remained very much the same as last year.

The viability of an exit exam system depends in part on the options it provides to help students pass the exam and earn a diploma. These options include opportunities for students who fail an exit exam to take the test again, acceptance of exam scores from other states for transfer students, and alternate paths to graduation for students with special needs and students who have performed adequately in school but are struggling to pass the exam after repeated attempts.

On one hand, providing options for struggling students permits some flexibility for students who deserve a diploma but have trouble demonstrating what they know through a traditional exit exam. It can also improve public perceptions about the fairness of an exit exam and help maintain political support for the exam. On the other hand, allowing too many ways around the basic requirement can dilute the value of and defeat the purpose of an exit exam.

In trying to balance these concerns, states have taken different approaches. While all states allow students to take retests, most do not waive exit exam requirements for students who have passed tests in other states. Moreover, states have adopted very different policies about alternate paths to graduation for students who fail exams after multiple tries. Some states offer a range of options, while others offer none except certificates for students who do not meet requirements for a regular diploma. Some limit the options to students with disabilities and English language learners, while others provide options for general education students as well. And some states have strict criteria governing which students qualify for alternate paths, while others are more lenient.

This chapter reports on findings from our surveys about options to help students meet exit exam requirements or graduate through other paths. First we discuss state policies for retesting students and accepting test scores from other states. Next we look at alternate paths to graduation for struggling general education students (those who are not special education students or English language learners). The alternate paths discussed include the following:

- Evaluating students' knowledge and skills through a state-developed alternative assessment in lieu of the regular exit exam
- Substituting satisfactory scores on other standardized tests, such as college admissions tests, for passing scores on the exit exam
- Using course grades, classroom evidence, or other criteria, alone or in combination, as an alternative method of evaluating student performance
- Offering a waiver or appeal
- Allowing accommodations for general education students
- Providing an alternative type of diploma or certificate

A final section describes options available for students with disabilities and English language learners. These options include the types of alternate paths listed above, as well as the option of taking an exit exam with accommodations—in other words, changes in the testing situation that make it possible for students with special needs to participate meaningfully in a test.

Retesting Policies

Basic state policies for retesting have changed little during the past year. As shown in **table 23**, all states with current or planned high school exit exams allow or will allow students to retake the exam before completing grade 12, but they vary in how many retesting opportunities are offered. In states with end-of-course exams, the number of retesting opportunities differs for individual students, depending on when a student takes a specific course. For example, a student in Maryland who takes the algebra test for the first time in grade 9 and does not pass would have three more retest opportunities than another Maryland student who takes and fails the test for the first time in grade 10. In Louisiana, the number of retest opportunities varies by subject, as will be the case in Minnesota when it begins to administer the GRAD tests.

Typically students are retested only in the subject areas they failed the first time, which serves to narrow the subject matter tested and shorten testing time. Furthermore, although our survey did not ask states about their methods for retesting, some states volunteered information indicating that their retests differ from the initial tests. Some of these practices include retesting students with only a subset of the questions in the original tests, administering online tests instead of paper-and-pencil exams, and using alternative assessments. These practices raise questions about whether retests in some states are less difficult than the original tests or differ from them in ways that could compromise the validity of the retest score.

All but one of the states with current or planned exit exams allow, or will allow, students who fail these exams to continue retesting after grade 12 if they have met all other graduation requirements. The exception is Oklahoma, which is scheduled to implement exit exams in 2012 and has not yet determined its retesting policies for students after grade 12. In 17 of the 24 states that permit retesting after grade 12, students may take the exam an unlimited number of times until they achieve a passing score and earn a diploma. Only three states (California, Nevada, and South Carolina) require students to be enrolled in adult education programs in order to retest after completing grade 12. Three states (Maryland, North Carolina, and Virginia) have age limits for retesting; Virginia sets older age limits (age 22) for students with disabilities and English language learners than it does for general education students (age 20). New Mexico is the only state that limits retesting to a specific number of years (five) after a student completes grade 12. And Idaho is the only state that allows retesting after 12th grade but places the ultimate decision in the hands of local districts.

Providing unlimited retest opportunities after grade 12 does not guarantee, however, that students will actually continue to take the tests until they earn a high school diploma. Massachusetts, for example, reported that in the class of 2005 the average student retested about 1.4 times after grade 12, but this does not mean that all students passed the test on their last attempt. Our survey did not ask how many students continue retesting after grade 12, and what percentage eventually passes the exit exam. One state we surveyed noted that it does not collect data on the number of times students retest after grade 12, and two states volunteered that they do not collect pass rate data for these students. It seems unlikely that many states collect data on students taking and passing the test after 12th grade.

Table 23

Retesting Before and After Completing Grade 12

State	Number of retest opportunities before completing grade 12	Retesting opportunities after completing grade 12
Alabama	4	Unlimited
Alaska	4	Unlimited
Arizona	4	Unlimited
California	5	Unlimited, must be enrolled in adult education
Florida	5	Unlimited
Georgia	5	Unlimited
Idaho	9	Local decision
Indiana	4	Unlimited
Louisiana	6 (ELA/math), 3 (science/social studies)	Unlimited
Maryland	3 per year	3 times a year until age 21
Massachusetts	4	Unlimited
Minnesota	10 (GRAD writing), 7 (GRAD reading), 4 (GRAD math) ¹	Unlimited
Mississippi	5 per year	Unlimited
Nevada	6	Unlimited, must be enrolled in adult education
New Jersey	2	Unlimited
New Mexico	4	2 times a year for 5 years after grade 12
New York	3 per year	Yes, no limitations specified
North Carolina	1 per year for the competency and computer skills tests, plus an additional retake the last month of 12 th grade; 2 before 12 th grade for end-of-course tests	Unlimited until age 21 or beyond if district allows
Ohio	6	Unlimited
Oklahoma	Unlimited	To be determined
South Carolina	Unlimited	Unlimited, must be enrolled in adult education
Tennessee	3 per year	Unlimited
Texas	4	Unlimited
Virginia	3 per year	Unlimited as long as students are no older than 20 for general education students or 22 for students with disabilities and ELLs
Washington	4 retakes at state expense, plus additional retakes at students' own expense	Yes, no limitations specified

Table reads: Students in Alabama have four opportunities to retake the state's exit exam before completing grade 12, and they may continue to retest an unlimited number of times after completing grade 12 to receive a diploma. In New Mexico, students have four opportunities to retake the exit exam before completing grade 12 and may continue to retake the exam twice a year for five years after completing grade 12 to receive a diploma.

¹ Minnesota currently requires students to pass the Basic Skills Test. Students have 11 opportunities to retake the BST math and reading tests and 8 opportunities to retake the BST written composition test by the end of 12th grade, and may continue to retake the BST after completing grade 12. However, students who were in grade 8 in 2004-05 are the last class required to pass the BST. In 2006-07, Minnesota will begin to administer the GRAD tests, which will become a graduation requirement for the class of 2010.

Source: Center on Education Policy, survey of state departments of education, June 2006, items 11 & 12.

Accepting Test Scores from Other States

Of the 25 states with current or planned exit exams, 9 reported that they permit, or in the future will permit, transfer students to submit passing scores from other states instead of requiring them to pass the state's own exit exam. This amounts to four more states than last year, as shown in **figure 4**. Among these nine states, only two (Alaska and Idaho) require the scores to come from other states' high school exit exams (and to be passing scores). Arizona and New Mexico accept scores from other states' assessments that are based on academic standards substantially equivalent to their own. Texas and Washington accept SAT or ACT scores from transfer students. Maryland and Mississippi, both of which administer end-of-course exams, will exempt a student transferring from another state from taking the exit exams if the student passed an equivalent course and is granted credit for the course by the new school. Indiana specified that it accepts scores from tests other than an exit exam. In other words, in more than half of the states that accept other states' test scores, the transfer student need not have passed a high school exit exam or even have come from a state that implements exit exams.

Figure 4

State Policies for Accepting Other States' Test Scores

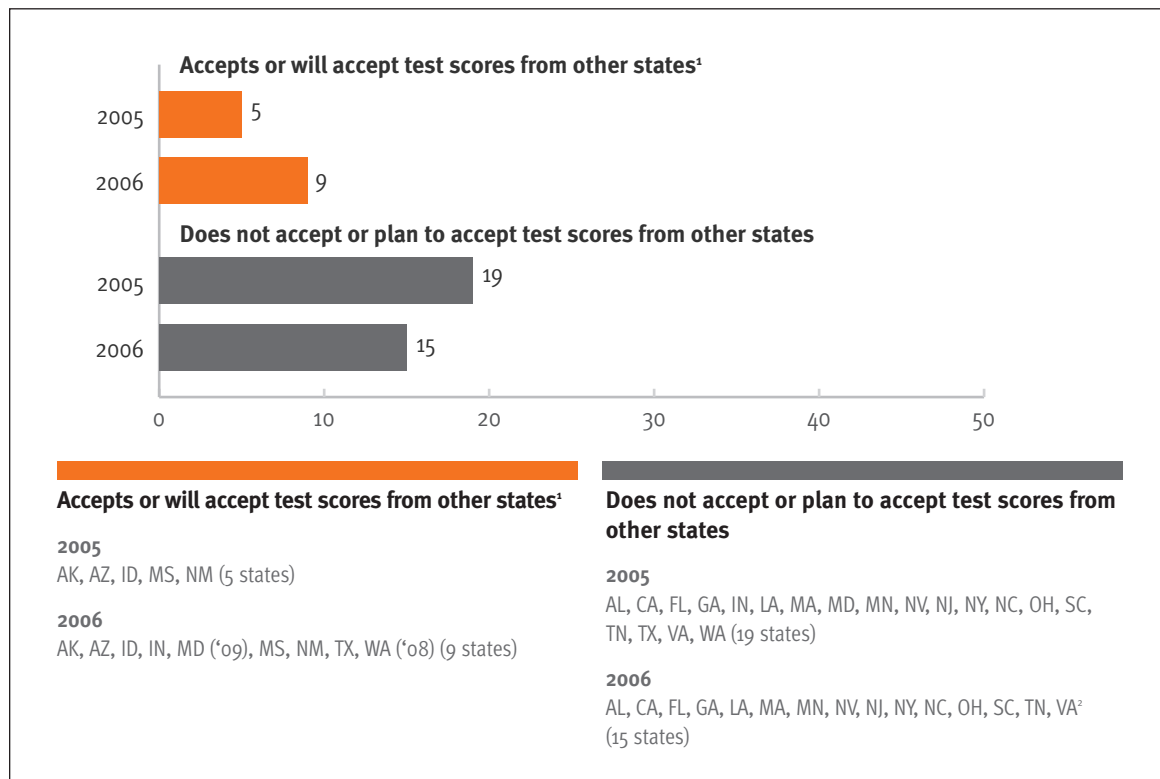


Figure reads: In 2005, 5 states, including Alaska, accepted test scores from other states and 19 states, including Alabama, did not. In 2006, 9 states accepted test scores from other states, and 15 states did not.

¹ Oklahoma is not shown in either category of the table because although the state board of education has been charged with adopting rules that provide for necessary student exceptions and exemptions to the exit exam requirement, it has not yet issued its specific policies for using other states' test scores.

² Virginia does not currently accept test scores from other states, although recent revisions to state regulations may allow scores from other states' tests to be used in the future.

Source: Center on Education Policy, exit exam survey of state departments of education, June 2006, item 18.

Still, 15 states with current or planned exit exams do not accept scores from other states' tests at all. This resistance may stem from concerns that accepting other states' scores will defeat the purpose of certifying that all students who receive a state-endorsed diploma have actually learned the knowledge and skills that the state expects its graduates to acquire. Curriculum and performance expectations differ among states, as do the content, difficulty, and other aspects of their exit exams. Officials in a given state may be reluctant to give transfer students credit for passing exams aligned to a different set of curriculum standards or lower expectations.

A powerful example of the challenges students face when states do not give them credit for passing another state's exam occurred when thousands of high school seniors were forced to evacuate after Hurricane Katrina and take up residence in states that required them to pass an exit exam. As discussed in **box 5**, the issue was eventually resolved for students from Louisiana when Louisiana allowed them to take its exit exam online and receive a Louisiana diploma if they passed. But states' experiences with Hurricane Katrina highlight the need for long-term solutions for the constant stream of high school students who face new requirements when they move to new states for more mundane reasons than a natural disaster. The Katrina experience also shows that states can craft solutions when they perceive the need for one.

Box 5

Exit Exams Policies for High School Students Displaced by Hurricane Katrina

States have been slow to adopt policies for accepting test scores from other states, perhaps because they believe the need for such measures is limited to the occasional student whose family moves for a new job or military post. But when large numbers of students were affected by an extraordinary circumstance, Hurricane Katrina, states were forced to explore ways that displaced students could receive a high school diploma without having to face a new exit exam requirement late in their high school careers.

Federal estimates of the number of students displaced because of Hurricane Katrina eventually reached 372,000, the majority from Gulf Coast states like Louisiana and Mississippi (Lips, 2005). While some students moved to other districts in their states, many others moved to new states—ones that had exit exams. For example, in November 2005, the Texas Education Agency reported that almost 43,000 evacuee students had enrolled in Texas school districts (Texas Education Agency, 2005).

In these states, displaced high school students, their parents, and educators began asking questions: Will students who have passed the exit exam in the state they left receive credit toward a diploma in their new schools? From which state or states can students get a diploma? Is passing the exit exam in their newly adopted states the only way to get a diploma? Several states with exit exams, including California, Florida, New York, Ohio, Texas, and Tennessee, decided that displaced students would have to meet the standards for receiving a diploma in their new states, which meant passing the state exit exam (Ayres, 2005; Elliott, 2005; Katrina victims must also pass exit exam, 2006; Riley, 2006; Smith, 2005; and Weiner, 2005).

This was a huge concern because differences in state standards and tests could mean that displaced students had not been taught some of the material on their new states' exit exams and would not do well. And in fact, low pass rates were a significant problem. Figures from districts across Texas showed that the initial pass rate on the TAKS for Louisiana students was less than half that of Texas students (Hackett, 2006).

After months of uncertainty and negotiations among states, at least one state, Louisiana, was able to craft a temporary measure that other states would accept to help high school students. Displaced Louisiana students in the classes of 2006 and 2007 would be allowed to take Louisiana's exit exam online and submit course credits from their host schools to receive a Louisiana diploma (Louisiana Department of Education, 2005). Other states, among them California, Ohio, and Tennessee, agreed to this solution.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on the news reports cited above.

Alternate Paths for General Education Students

Overall, states are expanding alternate paths for general education students to obtain a diploma other than by passing exit exams. (By general education students, we mean those who do not have disabilities and are not English language learners.) **Table 24** summarizes the variety and prevalence of these options. Most states (15) have one or more alternate paths, including alternative methods of evaluation, waivers, or appeal processes. (Each of these options is defined and described in more detail below.) Four states—Nevada, New Mexico, South Carolina, and Tennessee—provide no alternate paths other than an alternative diploma or certificate, which tends to carry less weight than a regular diploma.

Alternative Methods of Evaluation, Waivers, or Appeals

States offer various alternatives to passing the regular exit exam—whether through a formal waiver or appeals process or through a less formal, more flexible policy. In addition, as part of these alternative evaluation methods, waivers, or appeals, states use different forms of evidence to determine students' proficiency. In table 24, we have classified states according to the following types of evidence used (recognizing that several states use more than one type):

- **Alternative assessment:** The state uses an assessment that is aligned to state standards and has been created by the state specifically as an alternative to the exit exam for certain students.
- **Substitute test:** The state accepts a standardized test, such as the SAT or ACT, as a substitute for its exit exam; typically, the state determines a cut score on the substitute test and accepts scores above the cut-off in lieu of passing the exit exam.
- **Course grades:** The state allows course grades to compensate for low exit exam scores by either considering the student's overall GPA or looking specifically at course grades in the subject area(s) not passed on the exit exam.
- **Classroom evidence:** The state looks at the student's classroom work, portfolios of classroom assignments or products, or records of course completion.
- **Criteria-based:** The state uses other, multiple criteria to determine whether a student who has not passed the exit exam should graduate; examples of these criteria include participation in remediation, a specific attendance rate, or letters of recommendation from teachers or principals.

Alternative assessments or substitute tests

Nine of the 25 states with current or planned exit exams offer, or will offer, alternative assessments or substitute tests to general education students who have not passed the exams after multiple tries. In Maryland, for example, students not enrolled in high school may pursue a Diploma by Examination. This process requires students to pass either the Maryland External Diploma Program assessment (an alternative assessment) or the GED assessment (a substitute test). Students who pursue this route will receive the same Maryland High School Diploma as students who graduate at the end of grade 12.

General education students in New Jersey who fail the state exit exam can go through a Special Review Assessment (SRA) process, which allows them to demonstrate their mastery of required skills. The assessments used in the SRA process consist of performance assessments administered at the school level. In 2004, 18% of general education students who failed the state's High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA) used the SRA process while taking retests of the HSPA in the interim, according to the state's survey response. The former commissioner of education in New Jersey and others have criticized the SRA as detrimental to the students it is trying to help (Librera, 2005). In our survey, the state respondent

Table 24

Alternate Paths for General Education Students to Obtain a Diploma, 2006

State	Alternative Methods of Evaluation, Waivers, or Appeals					Accommodations for General Education Students	Alternative Diploma or Certificate
	Alternative assessment	Substitute test	Course grades	Classroom evidence	Criteria- based		
Alabama		✓					
Alaska							
Arizona			✓	✓	✓		
California							
Florida		✓					✓
Georgia				✓	✓		✓
Idaho		✓					
Indiana			✓	✓	✓		
Louisiana							
Maryland	✓	✓					
Massachusetts					✓		
Minnesota						✓	
Mississippi ¹			✓	✓	✓		
Nevada							✓
New Jersey ²	✓						
New Mexico							✓
New York		✓	✓				
North Carolina		✓					✓
Ohio					✓	✓	
Oklahoma ³							
South Carolina ⁴							✓
Tennessee							✓
Texas							
Virginia		✓					✓
Washington		✓	✓	✓			

Table reads: General education students in Florida, under circumstances described in that state's profile, may use a substitute test as an alternative method of evaluation to obtain a diploma. In addition, Florida provides a certificate of completion under specific conditions for students who do not meet the requirements for a regular diploma.

¹ Mississippi uses an appeals process whereby students may submit course grades, classroom evidence, or other criteria as evidence that they have mastered the subject being tested (Mississippi Department of Education, 2001).

² New Jersey's Special Review Assessment is being phased out for incoming freshman. As of July 2006, the state had not yet determined either an alternate appeals process or a timeline for this phase-out.

³ Oklahoma has not yet determined which specific alternative methods it will use.

⁴ Although South Carolina did not address the issue of certificates in its survey response, the state does give a certificate of attendance to students who do not pass its exit exam, according to correspondence between CEP and a state official.

Source: Center on Education Policy, exit exam survey of state departments of education, June 2006, item 13.

reported that state leaders were considering phasing out the SRA in favor of other means of addressing the needs of students who fail to demonstrate proficiency through the regular exit exam. According to our more recent follow-up communications with the survey respondent, the New Jersey Department of Education is committed to phasing out the SRA but has not yet determined the timeline for doing so or an alternative appeals process.

States accept scores from a wide variety of substitute tests in lieu of passing scores on exit exams. In North Carolina, for example, students can meet state exit exam requirements by substituting scores from the PSAT, SAT, and ACT tests, as well as from College Board tests such as ACT PLAN, ACT COMPASS, and ACCUPLACER. In Virginia, students can use the Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, SAT II, ACT, Test of English as a Foreign Language, Advanced Placement International English Language Examination, Cambridge International Examination, and the College Level Examination Program tests. Typically, however, less than 1% of students in Virginia use these substitute tests to attain a high school diploma, according to our survey. The minimum scores required on these substitute tests vary, but at least some states have set low minimums. For example, Idaho permits students to substitute exit exam scores with a score of merely 200 on the SAT in English or 460 on the SAT in math. In Florida, “concordant scores” for the 2004-05 exit exams were 410 on the SAT in reading and 370 on the SAT in math (Florida Department of Education, 2005). Low minimum scores arguably weaken the value of the substitute test.

Other forms of evidence

Eight states use other forms of evidence as the basis for their alternative evaluation method, waiver, or appeal process for students struggling to pass exit exams. (In some states, students who successfully pursue these processes receive an alternative diploma or certificate instead of a regular diploma.)

Arizona, for example, permits students who fail sections of the exit exam to “augment” their scores with points derived from course grades of a C or better. To qualify for the augmentation, students must meet all of the following requirements:

1. Complete all required courses with a passing grade
2. Take the AIMS assessment each time it is administered
3. Participate in remediation programs in the failed subject areas available at the student’s school

If students meet these criteria, and if their augmented score exceeds the “meet the standard” threshold, then they are considered to have met the alternative graduation requirement. But if students score extremely poorly on the AIMS, their augmented scores still may not be enough to earn a diploma.

In Indiana, students who fail the exit exam may be eligible to graduate if they do all of the following:

1. Retake the exam in each failed subject at least once per year after the year in which they first took the exam
2. Complete remediation opportunities
3. Maintain a school attendance rate of at least 95%
4. Maintain a C average or equivalent in the courses required by the state for graduation
5. Meet all other graduation requirements

6. Either:

- a) Complete the course and credit requirements for a general diploma, including the career academic sequence; complete a workforce readiness assessment; and complete at least one career exploration internship, cooperative education, or workforce credential recommended by the student's school; or
- b) Obtain written recommendations from their teachers in each subject in which they failed the exam; the recommendation must be supported by the principal and by documentation demonstrating the student's acquired knowledge

Georgia has a waiver process for students who are considered incapable of passing the exit exam due to disability or who have not had a reasonable opportunity to pass the exam due to substantial hardship beyond the student's control. In addition, the state offers a "variance process" that allows an alternate means of demonstrating academic proficiency for students who have not been rendered incapable of passing a section of the exit exam. As detailed in the state profile, students must meet all of the following requirements for the state board of education to grant a variance, by majority vote:

1. Pass any three of the five graduation tests
2. Meet attendance and course unit requirements for graduation
3. Have a 90% or better attendance record, excluding excused absences, while enrolled in grades 9-12
4. Obtain a scale score that falls within one standard error of measurement of passing the relevant section of the exit exam
5. Where applicable, successfully pass each end-of-course test related to the sections of the exit exam in which the variance is being sought

In Mississippi, the appeals process is much less specific. If a student fails a portion of the exit exam twice, he or she can appeal for a substitute evaluation, which relies on other evidence to demonstrate the student's mastery of the subject. Other evidence may include the student's grades alongside a written letter from the teacher outlining the student's work habits, attendance, and other relevant information, plus a portfolio of class work and tests completed by the student (Mississippi Department of Education, n.d.).

Finally, Washington uses a "collection of evidence" approach as one of its alternative methods. Under this approach, students and teachers work together to assemble a collection of the student's work that demonstrates proficiency in all of the major subject areas tested on the state exam. The collection must have sufficient evidence at a level that meets or exceeds state standards in each area. The collection is then scored off-site by trained raters who maintain high technical standards for reliability of scoring. This system is being implemented for the first time in fall 2006 (Conley, 2006).

The examples above give a sense of the range of alternative assessment methods, waivers, or appeals options used by different states. More details about these and other options for all states are contained in the state profiles at the end of this report.

Accommodations for General Education Students

Two states allow general education students who are struggling to pass the exit exam to take the exam with accommodations. In Minnesota, general education students may use any allowable accommodation after April 1st of their senior year to help them pass the exam. In Ohio, if a student's appeal is approved, he or she may have an oral administration of all the required tests, except for the writing assessment. Accommodations for students with disabilities and English language learners are discussed in the section below on accommodations.

Alternative Diplomas or Certificates

Finally, eight states award alternative diplomas, such as certificates of completion or certificates of achievement, to students who do not pass exit exams. Typically, these certificates do not have the same credibility as a “regular” diploma among parents, employers, or institutions of higher education.

Some struggling students are looking beyond the options offered at their public high schools to obtain a diploma. **Box 6** describes a trend of seeking diplomas online.

Box 6

High School Diplomas—“For Sale”

In lieu of meeting state exit exam requirements, some general education students are turning to less traditional methods to obtain their high school diplomas. For example, many colleges will accept students who have not graduated from high school or earned equivalency degrees. More specifically, some California community colleges run adult education programs and grant high school diplomas that are not subject to the California exit exam requirements. These seven community colleges, however, do have their own criteria for earning a diploma (Arenson 2006; EdSource, Inc. 2006; California Department of Education, n.d.).

More alarming, however, are reports of high school diplomas up “for sale” through what some may call institutions with questionable standards. The *Miami Herald* (Hiassen, Pinzur & Navarro 2005) highlighted a private school in Miami, the American Academy High School Corp., described by some as a diploma mill. Yet some local public school officials are guiding students struggling to pass the Florida exit exam to the academy, according to news reports. Most students never go to the actual school building but instead participate online. The school’s Web site promises a diploma in as few as 48 hours by taking a \$600 test online. Some students, however, attend daily classes and graduate within three months—paying approximately \$875.

Private schools in Florida, like those in many other states, set their own criteria for awarding diplomas. Still, many seek independent accreditation from associations like the National Private Schools Accreditation Alliance (NPSAA) or other regional or state associations. American Academy officials contend that the school is accredited by the NPSAA, but according to the *Herald* report, the NPSAA executive director said the organization rejected the Academy’s application and never accredited the school.

The Academy is just one of many proprietary schools promising diplomas, either online or in a physical classroom. *Education Week* published a story on North Atlantic Regional Schools, a private school in Maine that reportedly issues diplomas based on high school transcripts and course credits rather than exit exam test scores (Cavanagh 2004). A simple Google search by CEP staff returned numerous other examples of these “less traditional” options.

Sources: Center on Education Policy, based on the news reports cited above.

Alternate Paths for Students with Disabilities

As a group, students with disabilities have very diverse instructional needs and often have much lower pass rates on exit exams than students in general. It is a challenge for states with exit exams to develop appropriate and fair testing policies for these students that comply with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and NCLB.

Table 25 summarizes the variety and prevalence of options for helping students with disabilities meet exit exam requirements. All states offer some special options for students with disabilities; examples include a modified cut score on the exit exam, a special diploma, or an exemption from the exit exam requirement altogether. Students who use these options do not always receive a regular diploma, however. For example, students with disabilities who pass the alternative assessment in Texas receive a regular diploma, while students with disabilities in Washington who take the alternative assessment receive a certificate of individual achievement.

Table 25

Alternate Paths for Students with Disabilities

State	Alternative or Substitute Assessments	Waiver, Appeal, or Other Special Evaluation Method	Exemption or Delay	Special Diplomas or Certificate
Alabama		✓		✓
Alaska	✓			
Arizona		✓	✓	
California		✓	✓	✓
Florida		✓		
Georgia		✓		✓
Idaho		✓		
Indiana		✓		✓ ¹
Louisiana		✓		✓
Maryland	²	✓		✓
Massachusetts	✓	✓		✓
Minnesota		✓		
Mississippi	✓			✓
Nevada				✓
New Jersey	✓		✓	
New Mexico	✓			✓
New York	✓		✓	✓
North Carolina			✓	✓
Ohio	✓	✓	✓	
Oklahoma ²			✓	
South Carolina	✓			✓ ³
Tennessee				✓
Texas	✓		✓	✓
Virginia				✓
Washington	✓			✓

Table reads: Alabama permits students with disabilities to apply for a waiver of the exit exam requirement and also grants a special diploma to student with disabilities who do not meet the exit exam requirement. Alaska allows students with disabilities to take an alternative assessment instead of the regular exit exam. Arizona exempts some students with disabilities from its exit exam requirement and allows those who are not exempt to apply for the augmentation process available to all students.

¹ Information on this option came from Indiana Department of Education, 2006, rather than from the state survey response.

² Option is under development.

³ Information on this option came from follow-up e-mails with South Carolina staff rather than from the state survey response.

Source: Center on Education Policy, exit exam survey of state departments of education, June 2006, items 20 & 21.

In general, more states are offering special diplomas or certificates to students with disabilities, 17 states this year compared with 14 last year. Further, 10 states offer alternative or substitute assessments for these students; 12 states have a waiver, appeal, or other special evaluation method(s); and 8 states offer exit exam exemptions or delayed requirements.

Alternative Assessments or Substitute Tests

States continue to offer students with disabilities opportunities to take alternative assessments or use substitute tests, as defined in the previous section. Students with disabilities in Massachusetts, for example, can participate in an alternative assessment, the MCAS-Alt, which consists of a portfolio of student work collected annually by the teacher and the student. Approximately 1% of students in the state take this alternative assessment.

Students with disabilities in New Mexico can use any of the following three options to receive a regular diploma:

1. Pass the New Mexico Alternative Assessment
2. Participate in the Career Readiness Program of Study, whereby students take the standard New Mexico exit exam and meet a competency level determined by the student's individualized education program (IEP) team
3. Participate in the Ability Program of Study, whereby students take the standard exit exam or the New Mexico Alternative Assessment and meet a competency level determined by the IEP team

Waivers, Appeals, or Other Special Evaluation Methods

States vary in their conditions for granting a waiver or an appeal for students with disabilities. Usually a waiver involves demonstrating proficiency in other ways, such as through classroom work. Indiana has very specific requirements for granting a waiver to students with disabilities. Students who seek a waiver must do all of the following:

- Submit a written recommendation from key teachers that has the support of the principal, along with documentation of the student's acquired knowledge
- Retake the exam in each failed subject as often as required by the student's IEP
- Complete remediation opportunities as specified in the IEP
- Maintain a 95% attendance rate
- Maintain a C average
- Meet all other graduation requirements

More detail on these conditions is contained in Indiana's state profile at the end of this report.

In Idaho, students with disabilities in the classes of 2006 and 2007 may appeal to their local school board if their IEP outlines alternative requirements for graduation or if adaptations are recommended on the test. Some states provide alternate routes that do not fit as neatly into the specific categories of table 25 and are categorized as "other special evaluation methods." For example, although Minnesota offers no alternative assessment, a student's IEP team may modify the score needed to pass the regular exit exam. Students who graduate through this path receive a *Pass Individual* rather than a *Pass State* designation but are still awarded a regular diploma.

Exemptions or Delays

Seven states provide exemptions or have delayed exit exam requirements for students with disabilities. As mentioned earlier, an exit exam exemption does not necessarily mean a student will receive a regular diploma.

Here, too, specific conditions for the exemption or delay vary, as the following examples illustrate:

- Students with disabilities in North Carolina who participate in the Occupational Course of Study (OCS) are exempt from the competency test. Participation is determined by the IEP team for each student. However, students participating in the OCS will receive a graduation certificate instead of a regular diploma.
- Students in New Jersey designated “IEP-exempt” must take the test at least once, but their scores will not affect their graduation status. They can still earn a regular diploma if they fulfill all other requirements for graduation.

Special Diplomas or Certificates

Seventeen states offer special diplomas or certificates for students with disabilities. Usually these certificates are awarded to students with disabilities who do not pass the exit exam or, as detailed in some of the examples above, who take alternative assessments or use nonstandard accommodations. Typically these certificates are not valued as highly as a regular diploma, and some advocates for students with disabilities question whether they are given to some students who might be able to qualify for a regular diploma with additional supports. The California legislation that exempts students with disabilities for one year only is partly a reflection of the concern among some state leaders that all students with disabilities not be permanently relegated to lower expectations (Becker, 2006).

Virginia offers an interesting approach to special diplomas. Students who do not meet the requirements for a standard or advanced diploma may qualify for a “modified standard diploma” if they meet the state requirements for course credits and state benchmarks for numeracy and literacy. To qualify, students must earn 20 units of course credit and pass the state’s 8th grade English and mathematics Standards of Learning (SOL) tests. Standard and advanced diplomas require additional course credits and higher-level SOL tests (Virginia Department of Education, n.d.). Students with disabilities may receive a special diploma if they do not meet the requirements of the other diplomas but do meet the objectives of their IEP.

Alternate Paths for English Language Learners

According to our survey, only four states with exit exams—Idaho, Minnesota, New Jersey, and Oklahoma—offer, or will offer, alternate paths to graduation specifically targeted on English language learners. (Oklahoma reported that it will offer ELLs alternate paths when the exit exam becomes a requirement in 2012, but the specific options have yet to be determined.) This amounts to four more states than CEP reported in 2004, when none of the 25 participating states reported providing alternate paths specifically for ELLs, and two more states than CEP reported in 2005, when Idaho and Minnesota reported that ELLs were exempt from the test requirement if they had been enrolled in state schools for less than three years.

Among the four states reporting alternate paths for ELLs this year, a common approach is to exempt ELLs from having to pass the exit exam if they have been enrolled for less than three years in U.S. schools or in an English language proficiency program. In New Jersey, the Special Review Assessment process—described above in the section on alternate paths for general education students—is also available in three languages in addition to English for students who meet specific criteria. Students who use this alternative assessment must also pass an English language fluency test to receive a diploma. This last requirement is not unusual. The majority of states require students to be proficient in English to graduate, in that ELLs must pass the English language arts part of exit exams to receive a high school diploma.

All other states reported that they have no alternate paths for ELLs or that ELLs have the same options as general education students.

Accommodations for English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities

All states with exit exams allow English language learners and students with disabilities to take the exams with test accommodations. Accommodations are changes in the testing situation that make it possible for students with special needs to participate meaningfully in a test and that attempt to level the testing field by making a student's disability or language status less of a factor in measuring academic performance. Accommodations are often grouped into the following categories of adjustments in the testing situation (National Center on Educational Outcomes, n.d.):

- **Setting:** Adjusting the location in which a test is given or the conditions of the assessment setting
- **Timing/scheduling:** Increasing the amount of time allowed to complete the test or changing how testing time is organized
- **Presentation:** Adjusting the modes by which students access test material and/or directions
- **Response:** Adjusting the manner in which students are allowed to respond to test questions
- **Equipment and material:** Using assistive technology or instruments to facilitate students' meaningful participation

Many of the states we surveyed used similar categories to describe the accommodations they permit for English language learners and students with disabilities. Presentation accommodations are among the most common type of accommodations mentioned in our survey for both ELLs and students with disabilities. For ELLs, presentation accommodations often involve language aids, such as having someone read aloud the test directions or questions in English, translating directions into the student's native language, or allowing students to use word-to-word dictionaries to help them understand the material. For students with disabilities, common forms of presentation accommodations include using a large-print or Braille edition of the test, having a test administrator clarify or interpret into sign language the general test instructions, and in some cases administering the test orally (other than a reading test).

Accommodations in setting and timing/scheduling were also cited frequently in our survey. For both English language learners and students with disabilities, setting accommodations tend to include individual or small group administration of the exams or testing in a separate location. Timing/scheduling accommodations typically include extended testing time, extra breaks, or administration of the test in several sessions.

Response accommodations were mentioned less often by states for both ELLs and students with disabilities. For both groups, some states said they allowed students to dictate their responses to test questions. For ELLs, response accommodations may include allowing students to give oral responses in English that are transcribed by a teacher or, in some cases, to respond in their native language (typically for assessments in subjects other than English language arts). For students with disabilities, response accommodations tend to include dictating responses to a scribe or permitting a test administrator to monitor students' placement of responses in their answer booklet.

Equipment and material accommodations were mentioned by only a few states. Examples of this type of accommodation included the use of calculators, sound amplification, computer equipment, and other assistive technology.

Conclusion

Considering the rather low initial pass rates in many states, the workability and fairness of a state's exit exam depends to a large degree on the type of assistance available to students who fail the exams on their first attempt. The most obvious—and indisputable—way to help struggling students is to give them multiple opportunities to take the test again, before and after completing 12th grade. Another essential step is to provide remediation and other supports, as described in chapter 2. But even with these opportunities, some students will still fail exit exams after multiple attempts. States have responded to this situation by developing the alternate paths to graduation described in this chapter.

States face a challenge in creating alternate paths that will allow transfer students and students with special needs, unusual circumstances, or different learning styles to demonstrate their knowledge and skills without watering down the basic requirements for a diploma. It may also take a few years of implementing an exam for states to arrive at the right degree of flexibility. The most defensible and effective alternate paths grow out of students' educational needs rather than political expediency alone. They address the needs of a relatively small number of students, are aligned with state standards, and respect the integrity of the exam system. Effective alternate paths are also strict enough to prevent them from being seen as the easy way around the exam requirement.

States have taken different approaches in developing alternate paths, and some appear to be more lenient than others. In past reports, CEP has acknowledged the need for alternate paths while cautioning against opening the door too widely. But some states allow options that may end up diluting the value of the exam requirement. For example, exit exams were introduced in part to address concerns that course grades may not always signify that students have mastered the knowledge and skills expected of high school graduates. An alternate path that gives too much weight to course grades as part of its evaluation criteria could run counter to this basic purpose of an exit exam. Similarly, an exit exam system is intended to provide a clear and consistent measure of students' achievement. But some states have introduced a hodgepodge of alternate paths that lack consistency and may be at odds with the basic philosophy and rationale for an exit exam system.

To determine whether a state is allowing too much leeway through its alternate paths, one should look at how many students are actually using these options. This is difficult, however, because statewide information is not readily available. As a result of our survey, we learned that a very small portion of students in Virginia takes advantage of the state's substitute test options, while a larger share of students in New Jersey—too large in the view of key leaders and some observers—has used the Special Review Assessment. We do not know about other states; this is a topic for further investigation. What matters is not just the number of students using one particular option, but the combined effect of all available alternate paths.

Developing alternate paths that meet the unique needs of students with disabilities and English language learners presents a particular challenge. These two groups tend to have lower pass rates than other subgroups. In many states these groups—especially ELLs—make up a large and growing share of enrollments. An exit exam system is unlikely to succeed if it ignores the unique needs of these groups. An effective policy for these groups must be more complex than simply exempting these students from exit exam requirements, providing accommodations, or offering a simplified test. A well-developed policy for these students must include appropriate instruction, preparation, and remediation, as well as assessments that allow these students to demonstrate their mastery of knowledge and skills.

Finally, students from subgroups with achievement gaps—and for that matter, all students—are best served when they receive high-quality instruction beginning in the early years of their education, so they will be well prepared for exit exams by the time they reach high school. Alternate paths cannot remedy ineffective instruction or inadequate remediation.

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Profiles of State Exit Exam Systems

The profiles that follow provide basic information about the exit exam systems and policies in the 25 states that currently have or are phasing in mandatory high school exit exams. The profiles also provide data on state funding for remediation and pass rates on the exams.

The information in the profiles has been taken directly from the responses of officials in each participating state to the Center's 2006 state survey of exit exam policies. The survey responses have been condensed and edited somewhat to fit a standard format for the profiles. After developing the profiles, the Center sent draft profiles to the survey contacts in each state, asking them to review the profiles for accuracy. The final profiles contained here reflect the changes states made as a result of that review process.

Alabama

Alabama High School Graduation Exam (AHSGE), 3rd Edition

Type of test	Standards-based exam
Purpose	To ensure that all Alabama students have had the opportunity to learn the minimum knowledge in the core courses to earn a high school diploma
Year first administered	1999 for the 3 rd edition. (The 1 st edition of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam (AHSGE) was first administered in 1984. A second version of the state graduation exam, the High School Basic Skills Exit Exam, was first administered in 1995.)
Year diplomas first withheld	2001 for the 3 rd edition (1985 for the 1 st edition)
Subjects tested	Reading, language, mathematics, science, social studies
Types of questions	Multiple-choice
Calculators permitted on math test	Yes, all students are allowed to use state-approved calculators.
Grade first administered	10 th (this is considered a pre-graduation administration, but if students pass one or more subjects they receive credit toward graduation)
Grade(s) exam aligned to	11 th
Number of retakes allowed before end of grade 12	Four opportunities to retest, additional opportunity in the summer between 11 th and 12 th grade
Retakes after grade 12	Unlimited retakes after grade 12
Alternate paths to graduation for general education students	Use of GED as alternate exam
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for students with disabilities	Students with disabilities who do not pass the AHSGE may receive an Alabama Occupational Diploma or apply for a waiver for one subject-area test in the student's major disability to obtain a regular diploma.
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for English language learners	No
Cut score changes in past 18 months	No
Must private school students pass?	No (private school students do not receive diplomas with state seal)

continues ➤

Must home-schooled students pass?	No (home-schooled students do not receive diplomas with state seal)
Test used by colleges or universities for undergraduate admissions?	Some public universities and community colleges use the AHSGE. Also, some community colleges and universities require students who graduate from non-accredited high schools to pass this exam.
Accept other states' test scores	No
Effects on local course offerings	The exam does not have an effect on the number of classes students take. However, as the rigorousness of the exam has increased, the rigorousness of the classes has also increased.
Accommodations for students with disabilities	Breaks during testing, test administered over several sessions, small-group administration, oral administration except for reading, Braille and large-print exam materials. Students with disabilities who pass the exam using accommodations receive a regular high school diploma.
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes
Accommodations for English language learners	Breaks during testing, test administered over several sessions, small-group administration, use of dictionaries or glossaries, oral administration except for reading, and exam instructions in other language. English language learners who pass the exam using accommodations receive a regular high school diploma.
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes
Teacher professional development related to exit exam	The state provides training for teachers on how to teach test-taking skills and how to interpret test results, helps familiarize teachers with the content of the exam, and provides teachers with materials with activities for teaching the content of the exam.
Student preparation materials for exit exam	No
Must districts provide remediation?	Yes, although districts decide how and what kind of remediation to provide
Must students participate in remediation?	No
State funding for remediation	Yes, but amount is not available
Are test items released?	No
Exit exam used for No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?	Since 2003-04, the state has been using the AHSGE to meet the NCLB math and reading test requirements. The spring administration of 11 th grade counts for NCLB. The state will use the science section of the AHSGE for NCLB purposes in 2007-08.

Same cut score for graduation and NCLB?

Yes

11th grade cumulative pass rates, 2005

Percentage of Students Passing Exit Exam, 11 th Grade Cumulative Pass Rate					
Student Group	Reading	Language Arts	Math	Science	Social Studies
All students	86%	81%	78%	81%	76%
White	91%	87%	85%	90%	83%
African American	76%	69%	66%	65%	63%
Latino	72%	65%	73%	68%	63%
Asian	89%	88%	94%	88%	82%
Native American	90%	84%	84%	88%	81%
English language learners	48%	41%	65%	44%	34%
Free or reduced-price lunch eligible	76%	68%	66%	67%	63%
Students with disabilities	32%	24%	24%	35%	31%
Passing score (scale of 0-999)	563	560	477	491	509

Note: Students actually take the AHSGE for the first time in the spring of 10th grade as a pre-graduation administration. The pass rates in this table, however, are for the spring administration of 11th grade, when the exam first counts toward the graduation requirement. These data came from the Alabama Department of Education Web site at www.alsde.edu/Accountability/Accountability.asp.

Note: The AHSGE 3rd edition has four levels: advanced (level IV), pass (level III), fail (level II), and fail (level I).

12th grade cumulative pass rates, 2005

Percentage of Students Passing by the End of 12 th Grade					
	Reading	Language Arts	Math	Science	Social Studies
All students	95%	95%	95%	95%	94%
White	97%	97%	97%	98%	96%
African American	91%	90%	91%	91%	88%
Latino	89%	86%	93%	89%	86%
Asian	95%	97%	99%	97%	96%
Native American	98%	95%	96%	98%	97%
English language learners	68%	66%	88%	77%	67%
Free or reduced-price lunch eligible	92%	90%	91%	92%	89%
Students with disabilities	61%	57%	56%	66%	60%

Note: These data came from the Alabama Department of Education Web site at www.alsde.edu/Accountability/Accountability.asp.

Major changes in exit exam policy	No
Evaluations of state exit exam	The state did an alignment evaluation of the reading, mathematics, and science exams; it has not been published.
State test contractor	Data Recognition Corporation
Web site for exit exam information	www.alsde.edu (Click on Sections, then on Student Assessment)



Alaska



Alaska High School Graduation Qualifying Examination (HSGQE)

Type of test	Minimum competency
Purpose	To determine student competency in reading, English, and mathematics
Year first administered	2000
Year diplomas first withheld	2004 for most students (delayed from 2001) 2005 for students with disabilities
Subjects tested	Reading, writing, mathematics
Types of questions	Multiple-choice, short-answer, writing prompt/essay
Calculators permitted on math test	Only for students with disabilities who have this accommodation documented in their individualized education program or section 504 plan
Grade first administered	10 th
Grade(s) exam aligned to	Grades 8-10
Number of retakes allowed before end of grade 12	Twice a year
Retakes after grade 12	Twice a year indefinitely
Alternate paths to graduation for general education students	No
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for students with disabilities	Students with disabilities who do not pass the High School Graduation Qualifying Examination (HSGQE) by their sophomore year may be allowed to take an alternative assessment program, which consists of the modified HSGQE or the nonstandardized HSGQE. The nonstandardized HSGQE consists of an extensive collection of work that reflects competency in each of the state standards tested in the HSGQE.
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for English language learners	No
Cut score changes in past 18 months	No

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Must private school students pass?	No (these students are not eligible to take the HSGQE)
Must home-schooled students pass?	No (these students are not eligible to take the HSGQE)
Test used by colleges or universities for undergraduate admissions?	No
Accept other states' test scores	Transfer students who have passed all subtests of another state's high school graduation exam in reading, English, and mathematics may submit passing scores.
Effects on local course offerings	Many districts have implemented courses designed to help students who have not passed the exam acquire the skills needed to be successful.
Accommodations for students with disabilities	<p>Accommodations include but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extra assessment time • Breaks during testing • Test administration over several days • Individual or small-group administration • Braille and large print materials <p>Students with disabilities who pass the assessment using accommodations receive a regular high school diploma.</p>
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes
Accommodations for English language learners	<p>Accommodations include but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extra assessment time • Breaks during testing • Test administration over several days • Individual or small-group administration • Use of translation glossaries • Oral administration of the exam or exam instructions in English or the native language <p>English language learners who pass the test with accommodations receive a regular high school diploma.</p>
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes
Teacher professional development related to exit exam	On the state department Web site, teachers can find the <i>Teacher's Guide to the Alaska High School Graduation Qualifying Examination</i> , which provides information on the content of the test; a publication called <i>Guidance to Test Interpretation</i> ; and descriptions of what students must know to achieve proficiency.
Student preparation materials for exit exam	Practice tests for the three tested subjects are available on the state Web site.

Must districts provide remediation?	No																																																												
Must students participate in remediation?	No																																																												
State funding for remediation	No																																																												
Are test items released?	No, but sample items are available in the information guides on the state Web site																																																												
Exit exam used for No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?	As of 2005-06, Alaska no longer uses the HSGQE to meet NCLB high school testing requirements but instead uses the Grade 10 Standards Based Assessment.																																																												
Same cut score for graduation and NCLB?	Not applicable																																																												
Initial pass rates, 2005	<table><tr><th colspan="4">Percentage of Students Passing on the First Try, 2005</th></tr><tr><th>Student Group</th><th>Reading</th><th>Writing</th><th>Math</th></tr><tr><td>All students</td><td>69%</td><td>84%</td><td>72%</td></tr><tr><td>White</td><td>82%</td><td>90%</td><td>81%</td></tr><tr><td>African American</td><td>59%</td><td>80%</td><td>57%</td></tr><tr><td>Latino</td><td>62%</td><td>76%</td><td>57%</td></tr><tr><td>Asian</td><td>59%</td><td>81%</td><td>74%</td></tr><tr><td>Native American</td><td>65%</td><td>84%</td><td>68%</td></tr><tr><td>Alaska Native</td><td>43%</td><td>70%</td><td>53%</td></tr><tr><td>English language learners</td><td>26%</td><td>62%</td><td>43%</td></tr><tr><td>Free or reduced-price lunch eligible</td><td>47%</td><td>71%</td><td>55%</td></tr><tr><td>Students with disabilities</td><td>26%</td><td>43%</td><td>28%</td></tr><tr><td colspan="4"></td></tr><tr><td>Passing score (scale of 100-600)</td><td>322</td><td>275</td><td>328</td></tr><tr><td colspan="4">Note: The exam has four levels: advanced, proficient, below proficient, and far below proficient.</td></tr></table>	Percentage of Students Passing on the First Try, 2005				Student Group	Reading	Writing	Math	All students	69%	84%	72%	White	82%	90%	81%	African American	59%	80%	57%	Latino	62%	76%	57%	Asian	59%	81%	74%	Native American	65%	84%	68%	Alaska Native	43%	70%	53%	English language learners	26%	62%	43%	Free or reduced-price lunch eligible	47%	71%	55%	Students with disabilities	26%	43%	28%					Passing score (scale of 100-600)	322	275	328	Note: The exam has four levels: advanced, proficient, below proficient, and far below proficient.			
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Major changes in exit exam policy	No																																																												
Evaluations of state exit exam	Yes, results are available on request.																																																												
State test contractor	Data Recognition Corporation																																																												
Web site for exit exam information	www.eed.state.ak.us/tls/assessment/hsgqe.html																																																												

Arizona

Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS)

Type of test	Standards-based
Purpose	The state board of education is required by state statute to develop and adopt competency tests for high school graduation in at least reading, writing, and mathematics and to establish passing scores for each of these tests.
Year first administered	1999
Year diplomas first withheld	2006 (delayed from 2001)
Subjects tested	Reading, writing, mathematics
Types of questions	Multiple-choice for reading and mathematics; a single writing prompt for writing
Calculators permitted on math test	No
Grade first administered	10 th
Grade(s) exam aligned to	10 th
Number of retakes allowed before end of grade 12	Four retakes, beginning in fall of 11 th grade
Retakes after grade 12	Students who have met all other graduation requirements are allowed to retake the exam an unlimited number of times after 12 th grade.
Alternate paths to graduation for general education students	<p>Students who fail one or more sections of the exam may augment their scores with points derived from course grades of C or better. To qualify for this alternative, students must meet all of the following requirements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Complete all required courses with a passing grade b) Take the Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) assessment each time the test is offered c) Participate in remediation programs available at their school in the failed subject areas <p>Students meet the alternative graduation requirement if their augmented scores exceed the "meets the standard" threshold. However, if students score extremely poorly on the AIMS, the augmented scores may still not be enough to earn them a diploma.</p>
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for students with disabilities	Students with disabilities may be exempted from having to pass AIMS in order to graduate from high school. Students with disabilities who are not exempt from passing AIMS may qualify for AIMS augmentation (see preceding item on alternate paths for general education students).

Alternate paths to graduation specifically for English language learners	AIMS augmentation (see preceding item on alternate paths for general education students)
Cut score changes in past 18 months	New standards were set in spring 2005 to realign the test to revised curriculum standards.
Must private school students pass?	No
Must home-schooled students pass?	No
Test used by colleges or universities for undergraduate admissions?	No, but in April 2004, the Arizona Board of Regents voted to link students' AIMS scores, in addition to other achievement measures, to full scholarships to state universities. Students who achieve at the highest performance level (exceeds the standard) on all three content areas of AIMS may receive a tuition waiver at three state universities if they also meet other waiver criteria.
Accept other states' test scores	Students are excused from passing AIMS for graduation if they have passed another state's assessment with academic standards substantially equivalent to Arizona's.
Effects on local course offerings	The state has not collected data on this issue.
Accommodations for students with disabilities	Extended testing time, more breaks, administration in several shorter sessions; separate, small group, or one-on-one administration; special seating, lighting, or furniture; repeating directions, clarifying or simplifying language of directions in English, reading or signing directions; exact oral translation of directions upon student request; use of translation dictionary; and other accommodations listed in Testing Accommodations: Guidelines for 2005-2006, available at www.ade.az.gov/standards/aims/Administering/ .
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes
Accommodations for English language learners	Extended testing time, more breaks, administration in several shorter sessions; separate, small group, or one-on-one administration; special seating, lighting, or furniture; repeating directions, clarifying or simplifying language of directions in English, reading or signing directions; exact oral translation of directions upon student request; use of translation dictionary; and other accommodations listed in Testing Accommodations: Guidelines for 2005-2006, available at www.ade.az.gov/standards/aims/Administering/ .
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes
Teacher professional development related to exit exam	Every district and charter school operator is required to send a representative to a mandatory pre-test workshop for training in proper test administration procedures. During 2005-06, the Arizona Department of Education purchased an individualized student tutoring guide for every high school student who had failed one or more content areas of the AIMS test in spring 2005. Every county in the state offered free professional development on using the tutoring guides effectively. Schools and districts could arrange for additional professional development to be held at their own schools.

Student preparation materials for exit exam	The state has developed computer-based programs, study guides, Web site sources, publicly released test items, and custom tutoring guides. When students fail the exam, the state or district must provide them with information, such as future test dates, to help them prepare for future test administrations.
Must districts provide remediation?	No, but districts are expected to provide remediation and normally do
Must students participate in remediation?	No, although students must participate in remediation to qualify for the AIMS augmentation option
State funding for remediation	\$5.5 million for AIMS intervention and dropout prevention; \$2.1 million for the custom tutoring guides; and \$1.5 million for tutoring at selected low-performing schools
Are test items released?	The state releases a selection of items from the reading and math test as well as a writing prompt.
Exit exam used for No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?	The first administration in grade 10 is used for NCLB purposes.
Same cut score for graduation and NCLB?	Yes

Initial pass rates, 2005

Percentage of Students Passing on the First Try, 2005			
Student Group	Reading/ Language Arts	Writing	Math
All students	72%	72%	67%
White	85%	82%	80%
African American	64%	68%	54%
Latino	56%	59%	52%
Asian	84%	86%	84%
Native American	48%	50%	44%
English language learners	31%	34%	34%
Free or reduced-price lunch eligible	54%	55%	50%
Students with disabilities	30%	29%	23%
Passing score (scale of 500-900)	674	678	683
Note: The achievement levels are exceeds the standard, meets the standard, approaches the standard, and falls below the standard.			

Cumulative pass rates, 2005	Not available
Major changes in exit exam policy	No
Evaluations of state exit exam	2005 AIMS alignment study by the University of Arizona, Department of Educational Psychology (available at www.ade.az.gov/standards/AIMS/Administering/Default.asp).
State test contractor	CTB/McGraw Hill
Web site for exit exam information	www.ade.state.az.us/standards/aims/gradrequire/



California

California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE)

Type of test	Standards-based
Purpose	To significantly improve pupil achievement in public high schools and ensure that pupils who graduate from public high schools can demonstrate grade-level competency in reading, writing, and mathematics. The exam helps to identify students who are not demonstrating grade-level competency and encourages districts to give these students attention and resources to help them acquire the necessary skills during their high school years.
Year first administered	2001 for the original exam. The exam was revised in 2003, and this revised exam was first administered in 2004.
Year diplomas first withheld	2006, except for students with disabilities who meet the criteria for a local waiver or one-year exemption set forth in state law
Subjects tested	English-language arts and mathematics
Types of questions	Multiple-choice and a writing prompt
Calculators permitted on math test	Only students with disabilities may use a calculator, and only if this use is specified in their individualized education program (IEP) or section 504 plan. Use of a calculator is considered a test modification that alters what the test measures. Students who use a calculator (or any other modification) and achieve the equivalent of a passing score may request a waiver of the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE) requirement from their local school board (see section below on alternate paths for students with disabilities).
Grade first administered	10 th
Grade(s) exam aligned to	The English-language arts part of the exam addresses state content standards through grade 10. The mathematics part addresses state content standards in grades 6 and 7 and in Algebra I.
Number of retakes allowed before end of grade 12	Students who progress through grades 10-12 at the normal pace have up to five retake opportunities, in addition to the first administration in grade 10. These include two possible retakes in grade 11 and three in grade 12. Students may not retake parts of the exam they have previously passed.
Retakes after grade 12	Students who complete all graduation requirements except passing the exit exam may enroll in adult school and continue to retake the exam three times per year, with no limits on retesting opportunities. Students must be enrolled in adult school to retest.



Alternate paths to graduation for general education students	No
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for students with disabilities	<p>Three different options are available to students with disabilities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Local waiver request. Students who take the exam with modifications (changes that fundamentally alter what the test measures or affect the comparability of scores) and who receive the equivalent of a passing score are eligible to request a waiver of the CAHSEE requirement from their local school board. If the waiver is granted and the student has met all other graduation requirements, the student may receive a high school diploma. 2) Class of 2006 one-year exemption. Senate Bill 517, signed into law in January 2006, provides a one-year exemption of CAHSEE graduation testing requirement for certain students with disabilities in the class of 2006 who meet the criteria in state law. 3) Certificate of completion. Students with disabilities who are not on a diploma track may receive a certificate of completion, which is not equivalent to a high school diploma.
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for English language learners	No
Cut score changes in past 18 months	No
Must private school students pass?	No (these students are not eligible to take the CAHSEE)
Must home-schooled students pass?	Home-schooled students are required to pass the CAHSEE only if they are earning a public high school diploma.
Test used by colleges or universities for undergraduate admissions?	No, universities and colleges do not use CAHSEE results for admissions decisions or course placement. Students may be admitted to some of the state's colleges and universities without a high school diploma.
Accept other states' test scores	No
Effects on local course offerings	State law requires school districts to provide supplemental instruction to students beginning in grade 7 if they are not showing sufficient progress in the standards assessed on the CAHSEE or if they have taken and not passed the exam. The independent evaluator for the CAHSEE has found that school districts are steadily increasing the alignment of instruction to the state academic content standards and are focusing more on remediation courses.
Accommodations for students with disabilities	Students with disabilities must be permitted to take the CAHSEE with any accommodations or modifications specified in their IEP or section 504 plan. Available accommodations and modifications are listed in the CAHSEE regulations (www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/hs/documents/cahseeregs92005.doc).
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes, except where a specific accommodation or modification is not applicable to a particular subject or test presentation mode (see <i>Matrix of Test Variations, Accommodations, and Modifications</i> at www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sa/documents/matrix5.doc)

Accommodations for English language learners	<p>Under state regulations, school districts must permit English language learners (ELLs) to use certain test variations—changes in test presentation or administration or in student response modes—if these variations are regularly used in the classroom. Test variations for ELLs are listed in the CAHSEE regulations (see www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/hs/documents/cahseeregs92005.doc).</p> <p>English language learners who pass the CAHSEE using variations receive a regular diploma if they also complete all other graduation requirements.</p>
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	<p>Yes, except where a specific accommodation or modification is not applicable to a particular subject or test presentation mode (see <i>Matrix of Test Variations, Accommodations, and Modifications</i> at www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sa/documents/matrix5.doc)</p>
Teacher professional development related to exit exam	<p>California teachers are involved in several aspects of CAHSEE development, including item writing, item review, and essay scoring. These meetings are intended primarily to draw on teachers' expertise in the development of the exam, but they also serve as opportunities for professional development.</p>
Student preparation materials	<p>The state has made public the exam blueprints, which specify the state content standards assessed on the exam and the number of exam questions used to assess each standard. The state has also provided districts with student study guides since 2003 and has released exam questions from past exam administrations since 2001.</p>
Must districts provide remediation?	<p>State law requires school districts to provide supplemental instruction to students beginning in grade 7 if they are not showing sufficient progress in the standards assessed on the CAHSEE or if they have taken and not passed the exam.</p>
Must students participate in remediation?	<p>No, except for students with disabilities in the class of 2006 who seek the one-year exemption to the exit exam requirement</p>
State funding for remediation	<p>For school year 2005-06, the state allocated \$20 million for remediation for general education students in the class of 2006. The state also allocated about \$47 million for remediation for special education students in this class, but only part of this amount has been used specifically for CAHSEE remediation; no specific amount has been designated for CAHSEE remediation.</p>
Are test items released?	<p>Since 2001, the state has released more than 150 test questions in total from each part of the exam.</p>
Exit exam used for No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?	<p>Results from the first administration in grade 10 are used to meet the high school testing requirements of NCLB.</p>
Same cut score for graduation and NCLB?	<p>No. Beginning with the February 2004 test administration, the definition of proficient performance for NCLB purposes was set at 380 (scaled score) for both English-language arts and math—higher than the exit exam passing score of 350 for each part.</p>

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Initial pass rates, 2005

Percentage of Students Passing on the First Try, 2005		
Student Group	English-Language Arts	Math
All students	76%	74%
White	89%	87%
African American	64%	55%
Latino	65%	62%
Asian	86%	92%
Filipino	88%	87%
Pacific Islander	75%	73%
Native American	73%	69%
English language learners	42%	49%
Free or reduced-price lunch eligible	63%	61%
Students with disabilities	33%	30%
Passing score (scale of 275-450)	350 (55% of items)	350 (55% of items)

Cumulative pass rates, 2005

The class of 2006 is the first one required to pass the exam, so these data are not yet available.

Major changes in exit exam policy

State law originally required all students to pass the CAHSEE as a graduation requirement beginning with the class of 2004. The law also provided one opportunity for the state board of education to delay the consequences of the exam. In July 2003, the state board postponed the CAHSEE as a diploma requirement until the class of 2006.

In May 2006, a state superior court issued a preliminary injunction to prevent the exit exam requirement from taking effect. But later that month, the state Supreme Court reinstated the exit exam for the class of 2006 and ordered a state appeals court to decide whether the CAHSEE should remain a graduation requirement. As of press time, the issue was pending before the appeals court.

Evaluations of state exit exam

The Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO) is studying the impact of the CAHSEE and has released annual reports of its findings.

State test contractor

Educational Testing Service

Web site for exit exam information

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/hs/index.asp>

Florida

Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT)

Type of test	Standards-based
Purpose	To assess student achievement of the Sunshine State Standards benchmarks in reading, mathematics, science, and writing. The Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) also includes norm-referenced tests in reading comprehension and mathematics problem solving, which allow the performance of Florida students to be compared with that of students across the nation.
Year first administered	1998
Year diplomas first withheld	2003
Subjects tested	Reading, mathematics, science, and writing, but only reading and math results are used to determine whether students graduate with a standard diploma
Types of questions	Multiple-choice, gridded-response, short-answer, and extended-response. Students who retake the exam take a different but equated version that consists of multiple-choice and gridded-response items only.
Calculators permitted on math test	Yes
Grade first administered	10 th
Grade(s) exam aligned to	10 th
Number of retakes allowed before end of grade 12	Six, with the first retake opportunity in October of 11 th grade
Retakes after grade 12	Students who have not passed the FCAT but have met other graduation requirements may retake the exam after 12 th grade and still receive a regular diploma. There are no limits on the number of retakes or the age for retaking the exam.
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for general education students	Students may substitute preset minimum scores on the ACT and SAT for passing the FCAT. To use this equivalent score option, students must have taken the FCAT three times without earning a passing score. Also, students who do not meet the exit exam requirement may be awarded a certificate of completion instead of a diploma.
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for students with disabilities	The FCAT requirement may be waived for students with disabilities who have not achieved a passing score on the exam and have met all other requirements to graduate with a standard diploma.

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Alternate paths to graduation for English language learners	English language learners (ELLs) who do not pass the exam can use the same options available for general education students.
Cut score changes in past 18 months	No
Must private school students pass?	No
Must home-schooled students pass?	No
Test used by colleges or universities for undergraduate admissions?	No. Students who do not receive a diploma because they have not passed the FCAT can be admitted to limited non-degree programs and GED preparation courses in community colleges.
Accept other states' test scores	No
Effects on local course offerings	Students who do not pass on the first attempt often receive special courses with intensive instruction.
Accommodations for students with disabilities	<p>Accommodations include but are not limited to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Signing or orally presenting all directions and items other than reading items b) Dictating responses to a proctor or using a computer or alternative keyboard to indicate answers c) Taking frequent breaks d) Taking additional time e) Taking the test individually or in a small group f) Using adaptive or special furniture g) Using visual magnification and auditory amplification h) Using Braille or large-print exams and related materials <p>Students with disabilities who pass the exam using accommodations still receive a regular high school diploma.</p>
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes
Accommodations for English language learners	English language learners may use a flexible setting, flexible timing, or translation dictionary, or may receive assistance in the heritage or native language. ELLs who pass the test using accommodations still receive a regular diploma.
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes
Teacher professional development related to exit exam	The Just Read, Florida! program provides teachers and parents with the latest information on reading research. Teachers and principals also receive professional development to help them implement the Continuous Improvement Model (see next item).

Student preparation programs and materials for exit exam	The recently developed Continuous Improvement Model provides explicit, focused, and scheduled instruction to students on the tested state benchmarks, including intensive instruction on benchmarks that an individual student finds difficult. In addition, the FCAT Explorer Web site (www.fcatexplorer.com/) helps students learn about and practice the skills tested on the FCAT. The state Web site also contains released test items from past years.
Must districts provide remediation?	Yes. The state requires school districts to provide services to students who do not pass the FCAT. In addition, the state or district must provide these students with information to help prepare them for future administrations of the test, such as information about remediation requirements, optional remediation opportunities, future test dates, and implications for course taking.
Must students participate in remediation?	Students who do not achieve a passing score on the reading section of the test must take an intensive reading class before they are allowed to retest. There are no requirements for math remediation, although math remediation classes are available and highly encouraged.
State funding for remediation	For the 2004-05 school year, the state provided \$653,922,659 to Florida school districts for Supplemental Academic Instruction. The first priority for use of these funds was to provide supplemental intensive instruction, consistent with the Sunshine State Standards; this instruction included summer school and intensive English immersion for students in grades 3 and 10 who scored at the FCAT level 1. School districts are not required to report on the specific uses of these funds, but need only certify that the funds were used to support the authorized student progression activities. Therefore, total funding for remediation related only to the exit exam is unknown at this time.
Are test items released?	In August 2005, the state released a copy of the 2004 10 th grade FCAT, complete with questions, answers, and a marked difficulty level for each question (see www.myfloridaeducation.com/sas/fcatrelease.html). Additional tests for grade 10 will be released annually.
Exit exam used for No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?	Results from the first test administration in 10 th grade are used to meet NCLB requirements.
Same cut score for graduation and NCLB?	No. The FCAT passing scores for graduation are lower (in the mid-range of the level 2 or “basic” score) than those used for NCLB purposes (level 3). Additionally, the entire exam is used for NCLB purposes, while only math and reading are used for graduation purposes.

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Initial pass rates, 2005

Percentage of Students Passing on the First Try, 2005		
Student Group	Reading	Math
All students	52%	77%
White	65%	87%
African American	28%	58%
Latino	41%	71%
Asian/Pacific Islander	63%	90%
Native American/Alaskan	61%	85%
Multiracial/ethnic	59%	82%
Unreported race or ethnicity	32%	57%
English language learners	10%	47%
Free or reduced-price lunch eligible	35%	65%
Students with disabilities	17%	37%
Migrant	22%	59%
Passing score (scale of 100-500)	300	300

Cumulative pass rates, 2005

Not available

Major changes in exit exam policy

No

Evaluations of state exit exam

Florida was included in the Achieve, Inc. study, *Do Graduation Tests Measure Up? A Closer Look at State High School Exit Exams* (June 2004).

State test contractor

Harcourt (test development and norm-referenced tests);
CTB (test administration, scoring, and reporting)

Web site for exit exam information

www.myfloridaeducation.com/doe/sas/fcat/fcatpub2.htm

Georgia

Georgia High School Graduation Tests (GHSGT)

Type of test	Standards-based
Purpose	To certify Georgia high school students for graduation; to ensure that students have mastered the content necessary to succeed in postsecondary education or become members of an increasingly mercurial and competitive job market
Year first administered	1991
Year diplomas first withheld	1994
Subjects tested	English language arts, writing, mathematics, science, social studies
Types of questions	Multiple-choice, writing prompt/essay
Calculators permitted on math test	Yes
Grade first administered	11 th
Grade(s) exam aligned to	11 th
Number of retakes allowed before end of grade 12	Five. Students can retake the content area tests in July, September, and November and can retake the writing test in March and July.
Retakes after grade 12	Students who have met all other graduation requirements are allowed to retake the exit exam as many times as they need to after 12 th grade to receive a regular diploma.
Alternate paths to graduation for general education students	<p>The state has a waiver process that must be initiated by the student's home school. All students are eligible for the waiver, but the waiver request must include documentation of limitations that would account for failing the test. A waiver may be granted to a student who, due to disability, is rendered incapable of passing a section of the Georgia High School Graduation Tests (GHSGT) or to a student who has not had a reasonable opportunity to pass a section of the GHSGT due to substantial hardship beyond the student's control. A substantial hardship is a significant, unique, and demonstrable economic, technological, legal, or other type of deprivation affecting the individual requesting a waiver. Students who are granted the waiver and meet all other requirements may receive a certificate of attendance.</p> <p>In addition, in November 2005, the state approved a variance process that allows an alternate means of demonstrating academic proficiency for students who are not rendered incapable of passing a section of the GHSGT or the Georgia</p>

	<p>High School Writing Test (GHSWT). The state board of education may, by majority vote, grant a variance to students who have satisfied all of the following requirements:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Passed any three of the five graduation tests (four content sections of the GHSWT and the GHSWT) 2) Met state attendance and course unit requirements for graduation 3) Attained a 90% or better attendance record, excluding excused absences, while enrolled in grades 9-12 4) Obtained a scale score that falls within one standard error of measurement of the passing score for the relevant sections of the tests 5) Where applicable, passed each of the state's end-of-course tests related to the sections of the graduation tests for which the variance is being sought
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for students with disabilities	Students with disabilities may apply for the general waiver described above. A special education diploma is also available for student with disabilities who complete the requirements of their individualized education programs.
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for English language learners	No special paths for English language learners, although these students may apply for the general waiver described above.
Cut score changes in past 18 months	No
Must private school students pass?	No
Must home-schooled students pass?	No
Test used by colleges or universities for undergraduate admissions?	No. The state places the GHSWT scores on student transcripts, but there is no statewide protocol specifying how institutions of higher education will use these scores. Students who receive a certificate of attendance instead of a regular diploma because they failed the exam may be admitted to a two-year college after completing a GED.
Accept other states' test scores	No
Effects on local course offerings	Students are not mandated to take any particular courses in preparation for the GHSWT. The tests assess concepts and skills students have had multiple opportunities to learn throughout grades 9-11. The tests reflect core essential content contained in the standards for English language arts, math, science, and social studies.
Accommodations for students with disabilities	<p>Yes. Accommodations are usually broken down into the following categories:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Setting accommodations adjust the place in which the testing normally occurs b) Scheduling accommodations adjust the time allowance or scheduling of a test c) Presentation accommodations adjust the presentation of test material and/or test directions d) Response accommodations adjust the manner in which students respond to or answer test items

Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes
Accommodations for English language learners	Yes (same types of accommodations listed above for students with disabilities)
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes
Teacher professional development related to exit exam	The state has not established specific professional development programs to help teachers administer and prepare for the exit exam, but it has developed curriculum guides based on the exam, lesson plans to prepare students for the tests, and information guides explaining the tests.
Student preparation materials for exit exam	The state has developed study guides and practice tests for students. In addition, the state provides some targeted assistance to help special student populations pass the exit exams, including remediation education programs and instructional extensions. The state uses end-of-course exams for specific courses to gather diagnostic data that could be used to address student weaknesses in the areas assessed by the GHSGT.
Must districts provide remediation?	No, although all school districts offer some form of remediation to students who fail the exam
Must students participate in remediation?	No
State funding for remediation	No state funding specifically for exit exam remediation, although other state and federal money can be used to fund this type of remediation
Are test items released?	The state releases test items through its Online Assessment System. These items can be used in the classroom to inform instruction and for practice.
Exit exam used for No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?	The first administration of the exam in spring of 11 th grade is used to meet NCLB requirements.
Same cut score for graduation and NCLB?	No. The tests have been enhanced for NCLB accountability purposes. Additional items have been added to better address the depth and breadth of the curriculum. The enhanced tests also have two additional cut scores for the “proficient” and “advanced” levels. These performance levels are used to calculate adequate yearly progress for NCLB purposes but do not affect a student’s chance of passing for diploma purposes.

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Initial pass rates, 2005

Percentage of Students Passing Exit Exam, 11 th Grade Cumulative Pass Rate					
Student Group	Language Arts	Writing	Math	Science	Social Studies
All students	95%	89%	92%	68%	83%
White	97%	94%	97%	80%	91%
African American	92%	83%	86%	50%	72%
Latino	86%	73%	88%	51%	73%
Asian	95%	89%	98%	78%	89%
Native American	95%	86%	93%	78%	86%
English language learners	68%	43%	79%	28%	50%
Free or reduced-price lunch eligible	90%	80%	81%	50%	71%
Students with disabilities	69%	51%	57%	30%	45%
Migrant	74%	60%	80%	36%	56%
Passing score (scale of 400-600)	500	500	500	500	500

Cumulative pass rates, 2005

The Georgia Department of Education has studied cumulative pass rates by content area, tracking students through six consecutive exam administrations from spring 2004 through summer 2005. The percentages ultimately passing were as follows (results are not available for the writing test or by subgroup):

Language arts: 95.9%
 Math: 93.8%
 Science: 85.4%
 Social studies: 90.4%

Major changes in exit exam policy

Georgia is transitioning from the Quality Core Curriculum (QCC) to a new statewide curriculum, the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS). Starting in spring 2006, the language arts and science tests have been aligned to both the QCC and GPS. Consequently, new test specifications, blueprints, and reporting strands have been developed.

In addition, the state has also approved the variance process described above under alternate paths to graduation.

Evaluations of state exit exam

The enhanced GHSCT in English language arts and mathematics were submitted for an independent alignment study in February 2006. The final report is pending.

State test contractor

Data Recognition Corporation (test development); the Georgia Center for Assessment at the University of Georgia (scoring and reporting); and Pearson Educational Measurement (printing)

Web site for exit exam information

http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/ci_testing.aspx

Idaho

Idaho Standards Achievement Test (ISAT)

Type of test	Standards-based
Purpose	To ensure that students are learning the curriculum in Idaho's content standards and meeting Idaho's performance standards.
Year first administered	2004 was the first year the Idaho Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) was administered as a high school exit exam. Before 2004, the ISAT was administered solely to assess how well students were learning state content standards.
Year diplomas first withheld	2006
Subjects tested	Reading, language usage, mathematics, science
Types of questions	Multiple-choice
Calculators permitted on math test	Calculators cannot be used in grades 2-4. Students in grades 5-10 may use the on-screen calculator, although calculators will not appear on screen for computation problems.
Grade first administered	10 th
Grade(s) exam aligned to	The test is aligned to 10 th grade content standards, but the cut scores that represent proficient performance at the 10 th grade level are being phased in. Cut scores have been set for four performance levels—advanced, proficient, basic, and below basic—based on grade-level performance expectations. The cut scores established for these levels are being phased in over three years, from 2006-08, with gradual increases in scores. The score defined as proficient for 2008 is the expected level. As explained in the <i>ISAT Statewide Results Brochure Spring 2005</i> , available at http://www.boardofed.idaho.gov/saa/isat/ISATbrochure_SPO5_Final.pdf , students in the class of 2006 are required to pass the test at an 8 th grade level, students in the class of 2007 at a 9 th grade level, and students in the class of 2008 at the full 10 th grade level.
Number of retakes allowed before end of grade 12	Nine, starting with a first retest option in the July after 10 th grade
Retakes after grade 12	The state allows retesting after 12 th grade but places the ultimate decisions in the hands of local school districts.

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Alternate paths to graduation for general education students	<p>Students in the class of 2006 are allowed to substitute ISAT scores with scores of at least 17 on the ACT or 200 on the SAT in English, and at least 19 on the ACT or 460 on the SAT in math.</p> <p>Students who enroll in a district in the fall of their senior year and do not pass the ISAT may appeal to their local school board. The school board decides whether to allow the student to demonstrate proficiency through a locally established mechanism, which must meet the specific rules set by the state board of education.</p> <p>Students who are scheduled to graduate in 2006 or later and who have transferred to Idaho after scoring proficient or above on standards-based exams administered by an approved state are not required to participate in or pass the ISAT to receive a diploma.</p> <p>There are no alternate diplomas or certificates for general education students who do not receive a regular diploma.</p>
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for students with disabilities	<p>Students in the classes of 2006 and 2007 may appeal to their local school board if their individualized education program (IEP) outlines alternate requirements for graduation or if adaptations are recommended on the test. The school board decides whether to allow the student to demonstrate proficiency through a locally established mechanism, which must meet the specific rules set by the state board.</p> <p>There are no special diplomas or certificates intended specifically for students with disabilities.</p>
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for English language learners	<p>English language learners (ELLs) who do not pass the ISAT may appeal to their local school board. The school board decides whether to allow the student to demonstrate proficiency through a locally established mechanism, which must meet the specific rules set by the state board.</p> <p>ELL students in the classes of 2006 or 2007 who have been in the Limited English Proficiency program for less than three academic years can be exempted from the exit exam requirement.</p> <p>There are no special diplomas or certificates intended specifically for English language learners.</p>
Cut score changes in past 18 months	No
Must private school students pass?	Private schools that seek state accreditation are required to administer the ISAT.
Must home-schooled students pass?	In some instances
Test used by colleges or universities for undergraduate admissions?	No
Accept other states' test scores	Transfer students may submit passing scores from other states' exit exams to meet Idaho graduation requirements, if the exams are standards-based, test at least 10 th grade material, and cover subjects comparable to those tested on the ISAT.

Effects on local course offerings	Some schools offer remedial classes to 11 th and 12 th graders who have not received a proficient score in a content area required by the ISAT.
Accommodations for students with disabilities	Accommodations used are generally those specified by the student's IEP and used in regular classroom instruction. Common accommodations include flexible scheduling, alternate setting, different presentation of items, different response types, and assistive technology.
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes
Accommodations for English language learners	Accommodations generally apply to the mathematics tests. There is a separate test for students who are not yet proficient in English. Common accommodations include flexible scheduling, alternate setting, different presentation of items, different response types, and assistive technology.
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes
Teacher professional development related to exit exam	The ISAT prep class developed by the Idaho Digital Academy is designed to free up staff members to provide more intensive intervention for students who need it. The program can also be used to monitor student progress and evaluate interventions.
Student preparation materials for exit exam	<p>The state has provided each district with a computerized remediation or advancement program called the Idaho Plato Learning Network (I-PLN), which is available to all students.</p> <p>Since September 1, 2005, the ISAT prep class has been available free of charge. Developed by the state-funded Idaho Digital Academy, this Internet-based program offers ISAT preparatory courses in language arts, mathematics, and reading to assist Idaho school districts. The program is self-directed and is not meant to replace intensive intervention.</p> <p>More information about ISAT prep can be found on the state Web site at http://idla.k12.id.us/ (click on the ISAT Prep link on the left side of the screen).</p>
Must districts provide remediation?	No
Must students participate in remediation?	No
State funding for remediation	No
Are test items released?	No
Exit exam used for No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?	Results in reading and math from the spring administration in 10 th grade are used to determine adequate yearly progress under NCLB.

Same cut score for graduation and NCLB?

No. Eventually the state will use the same cut scores for both purposes, but for the classes of 2006 and 2007 the scores required for graduation are lower than those required for NCLB.

Initial pass rates, 2005

Percentage of Students Passing on the First Try, 2005			
Student Group	Reading	Language Arts	Math
All students	89.8%	85.6%	78.0%
White	92.6%	88.2%	81.3%
African American	80.3%	71.0%	56.0%
Latino	68.3%	65.0%	53.0%
Asian	83.3%	86.2%	81.1%
Native American	80.2%	71.2%	55.8%
Free or reduced-price lunch eligible	74.2%	66.9%	55.9%
Passing score (on a Rasch unit scale of 150-300)*			
	221	219	239

*The passing scores shown are for the class of 2007 and are based on a 9th grade proficiency level. The passing scores will rise for the class of 2008, the first class required to pass the test at a 10th grade proficiency level. For the class of 2008, the passing scores will be 224 in reading, 222 in language arts, and 242 in math.

Note: The pass rates shown are from spring 2005 testing for the class of 2007 (students who were enrolled in grade 10 in school year 2004-05). The rates show the percentage of these students who took the test for the first time that spring and passed it. The data in the table are drawn from the *ISAT Statewide Results Brochure Spring 2005* (www.boardofed.idaho.gov/saa/isat/ISATbrochure_SP05_Final.pdf).

Cumulative pass rates, 2005

The class of 2006 is the first required to pass the exit exam, so cumulative pass rates are not yet available.

Major changes in exit exam policy

No

Evaluations of state exit exam

Yes. Results are available at www.boardofed.idaho.gov/saa/ExtReview-May2005.asp.

State test contractor

Northwest Evaluation Association

Web site for exit exam information

www.boardofed.idaho.gov/saa/index.asp

Indiana

Graduation Qualifying Examination (GQE)

Type of test	Standards-based; combination of multiple-choice, constructed-response, and essay items; includes end-of-grade 9 English skills, end of pre-algebra and Algebra I mathematics skills
Purpose	As a qualifying exam for high school graduation to ensure that students have essential competencies in English and mathematics before leaving high school
Year first administered	1997
Year diplomas first withheld	1999-2000 school year
Subjects tested	English language arts (through grade 9) and mathematics (through pre-algebra and Algebra I).
Types of questions	Multiple-choice, short-answer, performance tasks in mathematics, and writing prompt/essay questions
Calculators permitted on math test	Yes on portions of the math test
Grade first administered	10 th
Grade(s) exam aligned to	9 th grade standards including Algebra I
Number of retakes allowed before end of grade 12	Four (in addition to initial test administration); first retake opportunity in the fall after 10 th grade
Retakes after grade 12	Students who have met all other graduation requirements but have not passed the exit exam may retake the exam as many times as necessary after 12 th grade and still receive a regular diploma.
Alternate paths to graduation for general education students	<p>Students who fail the exit exam may be eligible to graduate if they do <i>all</i> of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Retake the exam in each failed subject at least once per year after the year in which they first took the exam b) Complete remediation opportunities c) Maintain a school attendance rate of at least 95% d) Maintain a C average or equivalent in the courses required by the state for graduation e) Meet all other graduation requirements f) Either: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Complete the course and credit requirements for a general diploma, including the career academic sequence; complete a workforce

	<p>readiness assessment; and complete at least one career exploration internship, cooperative education, or workforce credential recommended by the student's school; or</p> <p>ii) Obtain written recommendations from their teachers in each subject in which they failed the exam; the recommendation must be supported by the principal and by documentation demonstrating the student's acquired knowledge</p> <p>Before July 1, 2010, a student who does not achieve a passing score on the graduation examination may be eligible to graduate if all the following occur:</p> <p>a) The principal of the school the student attends certifies that the student will within one month of the student's scheduled graduation date successfully complete all components of the Core 40 curriculum as established by the Indiana state board of education under IC 20-30-10.</p> <p>b) The student otherwise satisfies all state and local graduation requirements.</p>
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for students with disabilities	<p>Students with disabilities who fail the exam may be determined, by their case conference committee, to be eligible to graduate if the students do all of the following:</p> <p>a) Obtain a written recommendation from their teacher of record in consultation with their teachers in each failed subject; the recommendation must be supported by the principal and by documentation demonstrating the student's acquired knowledge</p> <p>b) Retake the exam in each failed subject as often as required by the student's individualized education program (IEP)</p> <p>c) Complete remediation opportunities to the extent required by the IEP</p> <p>d) Maintain an attendance rate of at least 95% to the extent required by the IEP</p> <p>e) Maintain at least a C average or the equivalent</p> <p>f) Meet all other graduation requirements</p> <p>The alternate path for general education students also is available to special education students.</p>
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for English language learners	None, other than the alternate path available to general education students
Cut score changes in past 18 months	A new test was administered in fall 2004, and new cut scores were set at that time.
Must private school students pass?	Students in accredited private schools are required to participate in testing. Students in non-accredited private schools take the exam if they are also enrolled in public school.
Must home-schooled students pass?	Home-schooled students take the exam if they are also enrolled in public school.
Test used by colleges or universities for undergraduate admissions?	The Graduation Qualifying Examination (GQE) does not affect college admission except to the extent it is a graduation requirement. The state is developing end-of-course tests that may be used for college placement.
Accept other states' test scores	Yes. The documentation submitted by students who seek to graduate using the waiver described above may include results from tests other than the exit exam.

Effects on local course offerings	The exam requirement has encouraged students to take Algebra I as freshmen.
Accommodations for students with disabilities	Several accommodations are available, including extended time and changes in test scheduling, presentation format, response format, and setting.
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes
Accommodations for English language learners	Several accommodations are available, including extended time and changes in test scheduling, presentation format, response format, and setting.
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes
Teacher professional development related to exit exam	The state has supported or established specific professional development programs to help teachers to become familiar with the exam and learn how to interpret test results. Teachers also have access to state-developed information guides, sample test items, and released test items.
Student preparation materials for exit exam	The state has developed information guides that explain the tests and include sample items. The state also releases all applied skills items after each test administration.
Must districts provide remediation?	School districts receive state grants for remediation, and schools must conduct a conference with parents of students who do not pass the exam to discuss a remediation program.
Must students participate in remediation?	Although students are not required to attend remediation services, they are ineligible to apply for a waiver of the exam requirement if they do not participate.
State funding for remediation	The state has established a remediation grant program that provides funds to school districts for remediation services to students who score below academic standards. Funding for remediation is \$4.8 million per year.
Are test items released?	All of the applied skills items from the exit exam, along with sample reports, are released to schools, teachers, and students, and are posted on the Internet.
Exit exam used for No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?	Results from the first time a student takes the exit exam count toward NCLB accountability.
Same cut score for graduation and NCLB?	Yes

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Initial pass rates from 2003 for class of 2006

Percentage of Students Passing on the First Try, 2003		
	English Language Arts	Math
All students	68%	64%
White	74%	70%
African American	40%	31%
Latino	46%	47%
Asian	74%	84%
Native American	52%	53%
Multiracial	65%	59%
English language learners	32%	44%
Free or reduced-price lunch eligible	49%	44%
Students with disabilities	22%	25%
Passing score (scale of 220-820 for English language arts and 300-920 for mathematics)	551	586

Note: The percentages above were the initial pass rates from fall 2003 for the class of 2006. The graduation exam has three levels: pass +, pass, and did not pass.

Cumulative pass rates, 2006

Percentage of Students Passing the GQE, Class of 2006*	
All students	88.5%
White	91.9%
African American	66.0%
Latino	70.4%
Asian	88.6%
Native American	91.3%
Multi-racial	85.6%
English language learners	49.9%
Free or reduced-price lunch eligible	74.7%
Students with disabilities	52.9%

*Results in table are based on a state match of student level data and have not been audited by districts to confirm GQE status or student membership in the class of 2006.

Major changes in exit exam policy	No
Evaluations of state exit exam	Yes, by Achieve, Inc.
State test contractor	CTB/McGraw Hill
Web site for exit exam information	http://www.doe.state.in.us/istep/welcome.html



Louisiana

Graduation Exit Examination (GEE)

Type of test	Standards-based
Purpose	Validates the high school diploma in that students who receive a high school diploma can read, write, and handle mathematical operations
Year first administered	2000-01 (English language arts and mathematics) 2001-02 (science and social studies)
Year diplomas first withheld	2003
Subjects tested	English language arts, mathematics, science, social studies
Types of questions	Multiple-choice, short-answer, writing prompt/essay
Calculators permitted on math test	Yes on some portions
Grade first administered	10 th
Grade(s) exam aligned to	Standards for grades 9-12
Number of retakes allowed before end of grade 12	Six retakes for English language arts and math, three for science and social studies
Retakes after grade 12	Unlimited retakes after grade 12 permitted for students who have met other graduation requirements
Alternate paths to graduation for general education students	No
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for students with disabilities	<p>Students with severe cognitive disabilities are eligible for a Certificate of Achievement instead of a regular diploma. Also, beginning in spring 2006, students with disabilities are eligible for a waiver of the exit exam requirement if they have fulfilled all the following requirements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completed a minimum of 23 Carnegie credits Met attendance requirements Passed two of the three required components of the Graduation Exit Examination (GEE) Participated in all testing and remediation opportunities available through grade 12, including the February seniors only retest Provided documented evidence of the disability affecting their ability to pass the exam <p>The state education department reviews the documentation and determines whether the student qualifies for the waiver.</p>

Alternate paths to graduation specifically for English language learners	No
Cut score changes in past 18 months	No
Must private school students pass?	The state does not require private high schools to administer the GEE but the test is made available for use by approved private high schools with the same graduation requirements as public schools. These private schools may issue a standard Louisiana diploma. Private schools that do not issue the GEE issue their own diplomas.
Must home-schooled students pass?	No. Home-schooled students do not earn a standard Louisiana diploma but instead earn a GED.
Test used by colleges or universities for undergraduate admissions?	No
Accept other states' test scores	No
Effects on local course offerings	None
Accommodations for students with disabilities	Braille, large print, answers recorded, assistive technology, extended time, communication assistance, transferred answers, individual/small group administration, tests read aloud (excluding the Reading and Responding session of the English language arts test), and others
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes
Accommodations for English language learners	Extended time, individual/small group administration, provision of English/native language word-to-word dictionary (no definitions), test administration by ESL teacher or by individual providing language services, test read aloud (excluding the Reading and Responding session of the English language arts test)
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes
Teacher professional development related to exit exam	The state has supported and established professional development opportunities through which teachers can learn how to teach test-taking skills and interpret test results, and can become familiar with the exam. The state has developed curriculum guides and lesson plans based on the exam and information guides explaining the tests.
Student preparation materials for exit exam	Variety of remediation programs, such as after-school and weekend tutorial programs, computer-based programs, practice tests, remediation courses for high school students, and remediation materials in Braille and large print
Must districts provide remediation?	Districts must provide 50 hours of remediation in each content area to students who have not passed the exit exam.

Must students participate in remediation?	No, but those who do not attend remediation are ineligible for any state waiver or appeal																																																																						
State funding for remediation	\$2,253,153 (subject to budget cuts due to hurricanes)																																																																						
Are test items released?	Some exam questions, along with sample reports, are released to schools, teachers, and students and posted on the Internet.																																																																						
Exit exam used for No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?	Since 2002-03, results from the first time a student takes the exit exam have counted for NCLB accountability.																																																																						
Same cut score for graduation and NCLB?	No. For NCLB proficiency students must achieve at the “basic” level, while for graduation purposes students must achieve at the “approaching basic” level or above.																																																																						
Initial pass rates, 2005	<table><tr><th colspan="5">Percentage of Students Passing on the First Try, 2005</th></tr><tr><th>Student Group</th><th>English language arts</th><th>Math</th><th>Science</th><th>Social Studies</th></tr><tr><td>All students</td><td>85%</td><td>76%</td><td>81%</td><td>82%</td></tr><tr><td>White</td><td>93%</td><td>88%</td><td>93%</td><td>91%</td></tr><tr><td>African American</td><td>76%</td><td>61%</td><td>66%</td><td>69%</td></tr><tr><td>Latino</td><td>77%</td><td>71%</td><td>79%</td><td>80%</td></tr><tr><td>Asian</td><td>88%</td><td>88%</td><td>85%</td><td>85%</td></tr><tr><td>Native American</td><td>89%</td><td>81%</td><td>89%</td><td>88%</td></tr><tr><td>English language learners</td><td>63%</td><td>65%</td><td>59%</td><td>63%</td></tr><tr><td>Free or reduced-price lunch eligible</td><td>80%</td><td>69%</td><td>72%</td><td>73%</td></tr><tr><td>Students with disabilities</td><td>37%</td><td>33%</td><td>37%</td><td>41%</td></tr><tr><td colspan="5"></td></tr><tr><td>Passing score for approaching basic level (scale of 100-500)</td><td>270</td><td>286</td><td>267</td><td>275</td></tr><tr><td colspan="5">Note: Students must score at the approaching basic level or above on three subjects—English language arts, mathematics, and either science or social studies—to be eligible for a high school diploma. The GEE has five achievement levels: advanced, mastery, basic, approaching basic, and unsatisfactory.</td></tr></table>	Percentage of Students Passing on the First Try, 2005					Student Group	English language arts	Math	Science	Social Studies	All students	85%	76%	81%	82%	White	93%	88%	93%	91%	African American	76%	61%	66%	69%	Latino	77%	71%	79%	80%	Asian	88%	88%	85%	85%	Native American	89%	81%	89%	88%	English language learners	63%	65%	59%	63%	Free or reduced-price lunch eligible	80%	69%	72%	73%	Students with disabilities	37%	33%	37%	41%						Passing score for approaching basic level (scale of 100-500)	270	286	267	275	Note: Students must score at the approaching basic level or above on three subjects—English language arts, mathematics, and either science or social studies—to be eligible for a high school diploma. The GEE has five achievement levels: advanced, mastery, basic, approaching basic, and unsatisfactory.				
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Passing score for approaching basic level (scale of 100-500)	270	286	267	275																																																																			
Note: Students must score at the approaching basic level or above on three subjects—English language arts, mathematics, and either science or social studies—to be eligible for a high school diploma. The GEE has five achievement levels: advanced, mastery, basic, approaching basic, and unsatisfactory.																																																																							
Cumulative pass rates, 2005	95% of all students pass by the end of 12 th grade (subgroup information not available)																																																																						
Major changes in exit exam policy	No																																																																						
Evaluations of state exit exam	State alignment study, available from the state department of education																																																																						
State test contractor	Data Recognition Corporation																																																																						
Web site for exit exam information	www.louisianaschools.net																																																																						



Maryland

Maryland High School Assessment (HSA)

Type of test	End-of-course exams tied to content standards
Purpose	The Maryland High School Assessments (HSA) are end-of-course exams that students must take when they complete courses in English 2, algebra/data analysis, biology, and government. Beginning with the students who enter grade 9 in the 2005-06 school year, students must pass the exams to receive a Maryland High School Diploma. The English 2 and algebra/data analysis exams are also used for NCLB accountability at the high school level.
Year first administered	2001
Year diplomas will first be withheld	Students entering grade 9 in 2005-06 for the HSA. The HSA end-of-course exams replaced the Maryland Functional Test, a minimum competency test that students were required to pass to receive a diploma between 1989 and 2004.
Subjects tested	English 2, algebra/data analysis, biology, and government.
Types of questions	Multiple-choice, short-answer, writing prompt/essay
Calculators permitted on math test	Yes
Grade first administered	Students must take each exam in January or May of the year in which they complete the course in the subject being tested.
Grade(s) exam aligned to	10 th
Number of retakes allowed before end of grade 12	Three testing opportunities every year beginning in the year the student first takes the course.
Retakes after grade 12	Students may continue to retest up to three times a year until they receive a passing score or reach age 21.
Alternate paths to graduation for general education students	Maryland citizens not enrolled in high school may pursue a Diploma by Examination, which requires the successful completion of the GED assessments or the Maryland Adult External Diploma Program assessment. Students who fulfill these requirements receive the Maryland High School Diploma by Examination.
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for students with disabilities	Students with disabilities who do not pass the HSA and cannot meet the requirements for a diploma may receive a certificate of program completion, the Maryland High School Certificate. To qualify, students must have completed four years of high school past grade 8 and meet one of the following conditions:

	<p>a) The student’s parents and individualized education program (IEP) team must reach an agreement that the student has developed the appropriate skills to enter the world of work, act responsibly as a citizen, and enjoy a fulfilling life; or</p> <p>b) The student will have turned 21 by the end of his or her current school year.</p> <p>Alternative forms of assessment for students with disabilities are discussed below in the section on accommodations.</p>
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for English language learners	No
Cut score changes in past 18 months	No, although the state board of education established cut scores for the new English 2 test when it replaced the previous English test in fall 2005
Must private school students pass?	No
Must home-schooled students pass?	No
Test used by colleges or universities for undergraduate admissions?	No
Accept other states’ test scores	Transfer students may be exempted from taking an HSA if they previously passed a course equivalent to one of the courses tested and are granted credit for the respective course by their new school when they transfer into a Maryland school.
Effects on local course offerings	While course sequences have not changed as a result of the HSA, school systems more often provide additional development and intervention opportunities for students before they are tested.
Accommodations for students with disabilities	<p>The state allows a range of justified and documented accommodations for students with IEPs. The exams are also available in Braille.</p> <p>Maryland is also considering a “comparable” assessment for students with disabilities who cannot pass the exam with accommodations but are performing at higher levels than students who receive a certificate of program completion. This new assessment would be comparable to the regular HSA rather than being an alternative assessment.</p> <p>In addition, a state task force is examining alternative options for ascertaining the skills and knowledge of students with disabilities who would not be successful on the exit exams even with continued intervention. The task force must report to the state board in fall 2006.</p>
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes
Accommodations for English language learners	Accommodations are commonly categorized in four ways—presentation, response, timing/scheduling and setting. Some possible accommodations include but are not limited to the following:

	<p>Presentation: Repetition of directions, explanation, use of bilingual dictionaries, or test administration by an ESOL specialist</p> <p>Response: Allowing a student to dictate his or her answers, or allowing a response in the student's native language</p> <p>Timing/scheduling: Allowing additional time to complete the test or provision of extra breaks during the test administration period</p> <p>Setting: Individual or small group administration of the test or a test administration in a separate location</p> <p>Selecting accommodations for instruction and assessment is the role of a student's English language learner (ELL) team.</p>
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes. Accommodations provided to a student must be the same for classroom instruction, classroom assessments, and district and state assessments.
Teacher professional development related to exit exam	The state has provided professional development and supported programs to familiarize teachers with the content of the HSA. The state offers online tools for the algebra/data analysis and government exams for teachers to use with students or to enhance their own knowledge. Tools for English and biology will be available soon.
Student preparation materials for exit exam	Online courses in algebra/data analysis and government are available free of charge to school systems. These courses can be used for either preparation or remediation. In addition, mini-tests aligned to the Core Learning Goals, full test forms of previously administered HSAs, and individual test items are available on the mdk12.org Web site.
Must districts provide remediation?	Yes. The state or district must provide students who fail the exit exam with remediation to help prepare them for future administrations of the test.
Must students participate in remediation?	Students who fail the exam must first be provided with interventions or other appropriate assistance before they can take a retest.
State funding for remediation	A new state formula grant program, the State Bridge to Excellence Act of 2002, sends extra funds to local school systems based on their numbers of students at risk. In addition, the state has made online courses available for free, as noted above.
Are test items released?	After each testing cycle, the state makes public a complete copy of each of the four High School Assessments, along with answer keys. These assessments are posted on the state Web site. Mini-tests constructed of assessed items by subtest are also available.
Exit exam used for No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?	The exams in algebra/data analysis and English 2 are used to satisfy NCLB accountability for mathematics and reading/language arts.
Same cut score for graduation and NCLB?	Yes

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Initial pass rates, 2005

Percentage of Students Passing on the First Try, 2005				
Student Group	English 2	Algebra/ data analysis	Biology	Government
All students	57.3%	53.8%	57.6%	66.4%
White	70.9%	71.2%	71.6%	76.0%
African American	38.8%	30.0%	33.7%	46.8%
Latino	45.8%	41.9%	44.3%	56.6%
Asian	74.5%	79.9%	76.9%	82.1%
Native American	51.7%	47.2%	51.4%	61.4%
English language learners	17.1%	28.8%	28.2%	40.3%
Free or reduced-price lunch eligible	35.3%	33.7%	35.3%	45.5%
Students with disabilities	15.8%	16.3%	18.9%	25.2%
Passing score (scale of 0-800)*	396	412	400	394
Minimum score for each test (with combined score of 1602)*	386	402	391	387

*Students may meet the graduation testing requirement by either achieving the passing scores (shown in the next to last row above), or meeting at least the minimum scores for each test (shown in the last row above) and achieving a combined score of 1602 on all four exams (the sum of the passing scores).

Cumulative pass rates, 2005

Since diplomas will not be withheld until 2009, cumulative pass rates are not available.

Major changes in exit exam policy

In May 2005, the English 2 exam replaced the English I exam. No other changes have been made, although the state is considering approving Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses and exams as substitute tests for the HSAs.

Evaluations of state exit exam

Achieve, Inc. conducted alignment studies of the HSAs and released the results in June 2004. Maryland is participating in the American Diploma Project with Achieve, and the state's standards in math and English are currently being reviewed for alignment with standards for college and work.

State test contractor

ETS

Web site for exit exam information

<http://mdk12.org/>



Massachusetts



Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS)

Type of test	Standards-based
Purpose	The Education Reform Law of 1993 mandated that students meet a Competency Determination in core academic subjects as a condition for high school graduation. The purpose of the exit exam is to ensure that pupils who graduate from a Massachusetts public high school have achieved grade 10 academic standards in English language arts and mathematics.
Year first administered	1998
Year diplomas first withheld	2003
Subjects tested	English language arts and mathematics. In June 2005, the state board of education voted to make science a graduation requirement beginning with the class of 2010. High school students will be required to pass a test in one of four content areas: biology, chemistry, introductory physics, or science/technology.
Types of questions	Multiple-choice, short-answer, open-response, and, for English language arts, a writing prompt
Calculators permitted on math test	Only on the second session of the two-session math test
Grade first administered	10 th
Grade(s) exam aligned to	10 th grade standards
Number of retakes allowed before end of grade 12	Four, beginning in the November after initial testing in spring of 10 th grade
Retakes after grade 12	A student who has failed the exit exam but met all local graduation requirements may retake the exit exam an unlimited number of times after 12 th grade. A student who has passed the retest and met all local requirements may receive a diploma.
Alternate paths to graduation for general education students	The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) Performance Appeals process provides an alternate path to students who repeatedly have not achieved the minimum score of 220 on the MCAS tests. A performance appeal allows a student to demonstrate through other specific measures that he or she possesses the skills and knowledge required to earn a Competency Determination. To qualify, a student must have met all of the following requirements: a) Taken the test in the subject of the appeal at least three times b) Received a minimum score of 216 at least once (except for students

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	<p>with disabilities)</p> <p>c) Maintained a 95% attendance record</p> <p>d) Participated in tutoring and academic support services offered by the school</p>
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for students with disabilities	<p>A student with significant disabilities can participate in an alternative assessment (MCAS-Alt), which consists of a portfolio of student work collected annually by the teacher and student. Approximately 1% of students in the state take the alternative assessment.</p> <p>A student with disabilities who does not pass the test but meets all other graduation requirements can receive a Certificate of Attainment, as long as the local school committee authorizes the district to offer such a certificate. In addition, a student with disabilities who qualifies may file a performance appeal.</p>
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for English language learners	No
Cut score changes in past 18 months	No
Must private school students pass?	No. Students in private schools who are educated with private funds are not eligible to take MCAS tests and are therefore not required to pass them to receive diplomas.
Must home-schooled students pass?	No. Home-schooled students who are educated with private funds are not eligible to take MCAS tests and are therefore not required to pass them to receive diplomas.
Test used by colleges or universities for undergraduate admissions?	<p>MCAS results are not used to make admissions decisions but are used to determine eligibility for two awards that provide a tuition waiver at a state college, university, or community college.</p> <p>The first award, the John and Abigail Adams Scholarship, is given to first-time 10th grade test-takers who meet all of the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Score in the advanced category in at least one section (mathematics or English language arts) of the MCAS b) Score at least in the proficient category in the other section c) Score in the top 25% in their school district <p>Students may retake the test in grade 11 to try to qualify for the second award, the Stanley J. Koplik Certificate of Mastery. This award goes to students who score at the advanced level on one MCAS test and at the proficient level on the other (as well as meet additional criteria).</p> <p>Students may receive both awards but are eligible for only one tuition waiver.</p>
Accept other states' test scores	No
Effects on local course offerings	Students are being encouraged to complete algebra and geometry courses by the end of their sophomore year. Teachers are also paying more attention to teaching writing and the development of responses to constructed response questions.

Accommodations for students with disabilities	Several types of accommodations are permitted, including changes in test scheduling, setting, presentation, or response format. Common accommodations include frequent breaks, small group or individual test administration, presentation by a familiar administrator, Braille and large-print versions, reading aloud of the test, and dictation of answers to a scribe, among many others.
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes
Accommodations for English language learners	<p>Students who have limited English proficiency or have been identified as limited English proficient in the past may use an approved bilingual word-to-word dictionary on MCAS tests.</p> <p>English/Spanish versions of the grade 10 mathematics test and math retest are available to Spanish-speaking students who have been enrolled in the continental United States for fewer than three years and can read and write at grade level in Spanish.</p>
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes for word-to word dictionaries. No for the English/Spanish math test (test translations are not available for tests in other grades).
Teacher professional development related to exit exam	<p>The state has produced NCS Mentor, a computer-based professional development tool that allows educators to learn how to score student responses to MCAS open-response questions and writing prompts. The goal is to help teachers internalize the state curriculum standards and performance expectations and integrate the MCAS scoring process into classroom instruction.</p> <p>The state also provides released test items, scoring guides, and samples of student work.</p>
Student preparation materials for exit exam	NCS Mentor, released test items, scoring guides, and samples of student work are available on the state department of education Web site for both the standard tests and retests.
Must districts provide remediation?	No, but schools are expected to help students reach proficiency levels in English language arts and mathematics
Must students participate in remediation?	No, but students who do not pass are ineligible for the performance appeals process if they do not attend the remediation programs made available by their school districts
State funding for remediation	The state provided \$7.65 million in fiscal year 2005 and \$7.58 million in fiscal year 2006.
Are test items released?	Released test items for all questions used to determine student scores from 2001 to 2005 are available on the Massachusetts Department of Education Web site at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/testitems.html . Samples of student work and scoring guides from 2001 to 2005 are available at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/student/ .

Exit exam used for No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?

Results from the first time students take the MCAS tests in English language arts and mathematics are used to fulfill the NCLB high school testing requirements for reading/language arts and mathematics. In particular, the results from initial grade 10 testing—but not from retests—are used to determine whether schools and districts meet the adequate yearly progress (AYP) performance and improvement targets under NCLB. Massachusetts also uses the cumulative percentage of students passing the English language arts and mathematics tests by the end of their senior year (including retests) as an additional indicator of AYP for high schools.

Same cut score for graduation and NCLB?

No. The state currently uses higher cut scores to determine NCLB proficiency than to award diplomas. To earn a Competency Determination students must score at the “needs improvement” level or higher. (However, the Massachusetts Board of Education has proposed higher standards.) NCLB requires all students to score at the proficient level or higher by 2014.

Initial pass rates, 2005

Percentage of Students Passing on the First Try, 2005		
Student Group	English Language Arts	Math
All students	89%	85%
White	94%	90%
African American	76%	64%
Latino	69%	61%
Asian	89%	91%
Native American	86%	73%
English language learners	45%	55%
Free or reduced-price lunch eligible	76%	69%
Students with disabilities	69%	61%
Passing score (scale of 200-280)	220	220
<p>Note: The percentages above are the initial pass rates for students in the class of 2007, based on tests administered in spring 2005.</p> <p>Note: The MCAS has four performance levels: advanced, proficient, needs improvement, and failing. Scores in the first three levels are considered passing scores for each subject.</p>		

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Cumulative pass rates, 2005

Percentage of Students in the Class of 2005 Passing the MCAS by the End of 12th Grade

All students	94%
White	97%
African American	85%
Latino	85%
Asian	95%
Native American	93%
English language learners	72%
Free or reduced-price lunch eligible	88%
Students with disabilities	77%

Major changes in exit exam policy

No

Evaluations of state exit exam

At the request of the Massachusetts Department of Education, Achieve, Inc. conducted an evaluation of the state's K–12 mathematics standards and grade 10 MCAS tests in English language arts and math during the spring and summer of 2001. The report is called *Measuring Up: A Report on Education Standards and Assessments for Massachusetts* (October 2001). (See www.achieve.org/files/TestGraduation-FinalReport.pdf).

In addition, the state has issued technical reports that describe the technical integrity of the MCAS high school exit tests and include validity evidence (see www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/tech_rpt.html).

State test contractor

Measured Progress in Dover, NH

Web site for exit exam information

www.doe.mass.edu/mcas



Minnesota



Phasing out the Basic Skills Tests (BSTs) Phasing in the Graduation Required Assessments for Diploma (GRAD)

Type of test	<p>The state considers the Graduation Required Assessments for Diploma (GRAD) tests to be minimum competency tests. However, the larger assessment system into which the GRAD tests are embedded, the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments, Series II (MCA-II), is intended to measure students' competency on Minnesota's academic standards.</p>
Purpose	<p>Minnesota is making the transition from using the Basic Skills Tests (BSTs) as its exit exam to using the GRAD tests. The GRAD tests measure the reading, writing, and mathematics proficiency of high school students. By requiring high school graduates to reach a specified level on each of these assessments, Minnesota is making sure its students are on track to have the essential skills and knowledge necessary for graduation in the 21st century.</p> <p>The GRAD tests consist of a subset of questions embedded into a broader set of tests called the MCA-II. The MCA-II is used to measure how well Minnesota student are achieving the state's academic standards for accountability under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). To receive a diploma, students must either reach proficiency on the MCA-II tests or achieve a passing score on the GRAD tests in reading and mathematics. In other words, if a student does not achieve proficiency in one or both subjects of the MCA-II, then the subset of questions that make up the GRAD tests will be looked at to determine whether the student has met the graduation requirement. Essentially, students can fail to reach proficiency on the MCA-II but still meet the graduation requirement based on their performance on the GRAD subset.</p>
Year first administered	<p>The BSTs were first administered in math and reading in 1996 and in writing in 1999. The class of 2009 will be the last class required to pass the BSTs for graduation; the class of 2010 will be the first class required to pass the GRAD tests.</p> <p>The GRAD tests are being phased in. The GRAD writing test will replace the Basic Skills written composition test in 2007; the GRAD reading test (a subset of the MCA-II) will replace the Basic Skills reading test in 2008; and the GRAD mathematics test (a subset of the MCA-II) will replace the Basic Skills mathematics test in 2009.</p>
Year diplomas first withheld	<p>Diplomas were first withheld in 2000 for students who did not pass the Basic Skills Tests. Diplomas will first be withheld in 2010 for students who do not pass the GRAD tests.</p>
Subjects tested	<p>Mathematics, reading, writing composition</p>

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Types of questions	The GRAD tests consist of multiple-choice items for reading and mathematics and a writing prompt/essay question for written composition. The MCA-II reading test includes multiple-choice and constructed response items. The MCA-II mathematics test includes multiple-choice, constructed response, and gridded response items.
Calculators permitted on math test	For the BSTs, all students are allowed to use calculators on a majority of the math items. In 2004, Minnesota included in its math assessments a subset of non-calculator computation items that students had to answer without a calculator, but these items were discontinued in 2006. The GRAD/MCA-II mathematics tests will allow calculators to be used on all problems.
Grade first administered	The BSTs are first administered in 8 th grade. The GRAD/MCA-II tests will first be administered in different grades, depending on the subject: the writing test in 9 th grade, the reading test in 10 th grade, and the math test in 11 th grade.
Grade(s) exam aligned to	BSTs: 8 th grade for reading and math, 10 th grade for written composition GRAD/MCA-II tests: 9 th grade for writing, 10 th grade for reading, 11 th grade for math
Number of retakes allowed before end of grade 12	BSTs: 11 retake opportunities in reading and math, 8 in written composition GRAD tests: At a minimum, 7 retake opportunities for the reading test, 4 for the math test, and 10 for the writing test
Retakes after grade 12	Students who meet all other graduation requirements except passing the BSTs can retake the exam an unlimited number of times after 12 th grade. The same rules will apply for the GRAD test
Alternate paths to graduation for general education students	To help students pass the exam, the state allows general education students to be eligible for any accommodation after April 1 st of their senior year.
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for students with disabilities	For students with an individualized education program (IEP) or section 504 plan, the IEP team may modify the cut score needed to pass the exit exam. Students with disabilities who pass in this way are given a Pass Individual notation on their record rather than a Pass State designation, but they still receive a regular diploma.
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for English language learners	The Basic Skills Test requirement may be waived for English language learners (ELLs) who enter the country within three years of their graduation.
Cut score changes in past 18 months	No
Must private school students pass?	No
Must home-schooled students pass?	No
Test used by colleges or universities for undergraduate admissions?	No. Also, students who do not receive a diploma because they did not pass the BST can still enroll in public community colleges by earning a GED or through an individual evaluation of their potential.
Accept other states' test scores	No

Effects on local course offerings	Since the GRAD tests are just being introduced, the state does not have specific information about their impact on local courses. However, the state expects that schools will require students to take more advanced mathematics courses to prepare them for the GRAD/MCA-II mathematics tests.
Accommodations for students with disabilities	The state allows test accommodations for students with disabilities if specified in the student's IEP or section 504 plan. Accommodations include extended testing time, individual or small group administration, special settings, English audiocassettes (on the math test only) for students who have difficulty with printed material, directions given in alternative format (such as signing or amplification), magnification or low vision aids for visually impaired students, scribes, recorders to document student answers, exams and other test materials in Braille, and other accommodations allowed by the student's IEP.
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes
Accommodations for English language learners	<p>The state allows test accommodations for English language learners, including extended testing time, individual or small group administration, translated directions, special settings, and English audiocassettes (on the math test only) for students who have difficulty with printed material. In addition, directions may be read, clarified, translated, or interpreted in any format or language.</p> <p>The Basic Skills math test is available in Hmong, Spanish, Somali, and Vietnamese, and some districts offer other languages. ELL students who pass the test using a translated version receive a Pass Translate notation on their record rather than a Pass State designation, but they still receive a regular diploma.</p> <p>The state does not plan to provide translated versions of the GRAD/MCA-II mathematics test. Instead, each district will be responsible for producing appropriate translations per guidelines provided by the state.</p>
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes
Teacher professional development related to exit exam	For the GRAD/MCA-II tests, professional development opportunities are being offered at the Annual Minnesota Assessment Conference beginning in 2006. Staff from the Minnesota Department of Education who have expertise in the content areas assessed are also offering professional development through presentations at state meetings and conferences, or upon request by districts. For the BSTs, state staff have offered similar kinds of professional development.
Student preparation materials for exit exam	For the Basic Skills mathematics and reading tests, the state has provided sample tests for districts and schools to use. For the GRAD writing test, the state will produce a handbook that identifies examples of high-quality writing for the current year's writing prompts. Minnesota also provides students with information about optional remediation opportunities and future test dates.

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Must districts provide remediation?	Minnesota requires school districts to provide remediation and establish a remediation plan for any student who has not passed the BST in reading by the end of 10 th grade. The state or district is also required to provide students who fail an exit exam with information to help them prepare for future administrations.
Must students participate in remediation?	No
State funding for remediation	No
Are test items released?	<p>Questions from the exit exam are released occasionally, although not every year. Selected items and sample tests are available on the state Web site at http://education.state.mn.us/mde/Accountability_Programs/Assessment_and_Testing/Assessments/MCA_II/index.html.</p> <p>Sample items for the GRAD tests will become available as the tests are introduced for reading in 2008 and mathematics in 2009. (See http://education.state.mn.us/mde/Accountability_Programs/Assessment_and_Testing/Assessments/GRAD_Component_MCA_II/Item_Samplers/index.html.)</p>
Exit exam used for No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?	<p>The Basic Skills Tests are not aligned with the state's standards and are first administered in 8th grade, so they do not satisfy the NCLB requirement for a high school test.</p> <p>The MCA-II 10th grade reading test will be used for NCLB purposes in 2008, and the MCA-II 11th grade mathematics test will be used for NCLB in 2009. (The GRAD writing test will not be used for NCLB.)</p> <p>Students will take the entire MCA-II only one time. Students who do not meet the graduation requirement on the first try, either by reaching proficiency on the MCA-II or by passing the subset of items that constitutes the GRAD test, will retake just the GRAD items rather than the entire MCA-II.</p>
Same cut score for graduation and NCLB?	No. For accountability in reading and mathematics under NCLB, students must reach the proficient level on the MCA-II. Students can meet the graduation requirement, however, by performing successfully on just the subset of questions on the MCA-II that makes up the GRAD tests. The GRAD questions are not as rigorous as the rest of the MCA-II questions. Essentially, students can meet graduation requirements based on their performance on the GRAD even when they do not achieve the level of proficiency on the MCA-II needed to meet NCLB benchmarks.

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Initial pass rates, 2005 (BSTs)

Percentage of Students Passing the Basic Skills Tests on the First Try, 2005			
Student Group	Reading	Math	Writing
All students	84.8%	74.3%	92.2%
White	89.7%	81.1%	96.2%
African American	56.4%	34.8%	73.0%
Latino	63.5%	45.7%	77.0%
Asian	76.1%	64.2%	80.8%
Native American	66.6%	47.1%	86.6%
English language learners	55.2%	39.6%	57.1%
Free or reduced-price lunch eligible	68.7%	52.2%	81.5%
Students with disabilities	48.8%	32.8%	68.9%
Male	83.8%	75.7%	90.3%
Female	85.8%	72.8%	95.2%
Migrant	49.2%	32.2%	61.1%
Passing score (scale of 0-750 in reading, 0-800 in math, 0-6 in writing)	600	600	3

Note: The percentages above show the pass rates on the BSTs in math and reading for students in 8th grade in 2005, and in written composition for students in 10th grade in 2005.

Cumulative pass rates, 2005

Not available at state level

Major changes in exit exam policy

As described above, the state is phasing out the BSTs and phasing in the GRAD tests.

Evaluations of state exit exam

No

State test contractor

Pearson Educational Measurement

Web site for exit exam information

<http://education.state.mn.us/ReportCard2005/>
 or
http://education.state.mn.us/mde/Accountability_Programs/Assessment_and_Testing/index.html



Mississippi

Mississippi Subject Area Testing Program (SATP)

Type of test	End-of-course, criterion-referenced
Purpose	To measure content knowledge in selected high school courses
Year first administered	1991 (Algebra I); 1997 (U.S. history, English II); 2001 (Biology I)
Year diplomas first withheld	<p>The class of 2006 is the first required to pass all four Subject Area Testing Program (SATP) end-of-course tests. However, the requirement to pass the U.S. History test applied to the graduation class of 2003; the requirement to pass the English II test applied to the graduation class of 2004; and the requirement to pass the Biology I test applied to the graduation class of 2005. With the requirement to pass the Algebra I test added for 2006, all four tests were required for graduation this year.</p> <p>To earn a high school diploma in previous years, Mississippi students had to pass the Functional Literacy Exam, a minimum competency exam introduced in the mid-1980s. In September 2000, the state board of education adopted the SATP tests as the new exit exam. The SATP was phased in over the past five years, while the Functional Literacy Exam was phased out. (See the phase-in schedule at www.mde.k12.ms.us/acad/osa/grad.pdf.)</p>
Subjects tested	Algebra I, Biology I, English II (with a writing component), U.S. History from 1877. Content is based on the Mississippi Curriculum Frameworks.
Types of questions	Multiple-choice for all four tests, plus a writing component for the English II test that asks students to respond to one of two informative essays
Calculators permitted on mathematics test	Yes on the Algebra I test
Grade first administered	Students take the exams at different grade levels, depending on when they complete the course in the content being tested.
Grade(s) exam aligned to	The tests are aligned to course content rather than to grade levels. However, most students take Algebra I and Biology I in 9 th grade, English II in 10 th grade, and U.S. history in 11 th grade.
Number of retakes allowed before end of grade 12	Up to five retakes each school year. Students who fail the initial test can begin retaking the exam at the next administration. Schools must offer pencil-and-paper exams three times per school year, in August, December, and April, except for the writing component of the English II test, which is scheduled for August, October, and March. Students also have opportunities to take all tests online in October and March, except the writing component of the English II test.

Retakes after grade 12	Students who have completed all graduation requirements except passing the exit exam may retake the tests until they achieve a passing score.
Alternate paths to graduation for general education students	<p>Students who fail a subject area test twice may submit an appeal for a substitute evaluation, which relies on other evidence to demonstrate their mastery of the subject.</p> <p>General education students who do not receive a regular diploma because they fail the SATP can also choose to earn a GED and continue to take the SATP until they pass it and receive a regular diploma.</p>
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for students with disabilities	Students with disabilities can receive a certificate of completion or occupational diploma; these alternate credentials do not require that students take or pass the subject area tests. Students with disabilities can choose to take the High Stakes Alternative Assessment. This alternative assessment is available only for students with disabilities who are pursuing a regular diploma but would need an unallowable testing accommodation in order to take the general assessment.
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for English language learners	No
Cut score changes in past 18 months	No
Must private school students pass?	No
Must home-schooled students pass?	No
Test used by colleges or universities for undergraduate admissions?	SATP results are not used to make decisions about undergraduate admissions, scholarships, or course placement in the state's public institutions of higher education. Students can be admitted into a public community college if they have a GED, but they cannot be admitted into a public university without a diploma.
Accept other states' test scores	Yes. Transfer students are exempted from taking an end-of-course exam if they have passed a course equivalent to the tested course and are granted credit for this course by the new school.
Effects on local course offerings	None
Accommodations for students with disabilities	<p>The state allows an extensive list of accommodations for students with disabilities. The following are just a few of the many accommodations on the list:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extended time • Scheduled rest breaks • Individual or small group administration • Special setting • Reading aloud of directions and test items (except that test passages or items on the reading portion of the English II test cannot be read to students) • Use of magnification or low vision aids • Use of scribe • Use of tape recorder to document student answers • Exams and supporting materials in Braille and large print <p>(Mississippi's <i>Guidelines for Testing Students with Disabilities</i> are available at www.mde.k12.ms.us/acad/osa/section5.pdf.)</p>

Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes								
Accommodations for English language learners	Accommodations such as the use of translating word-to-word dictionaries or spelling dictionaries								
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes								
Teacher professional development related to exit exam	<p>The state has provided all districts with curriculum intervention guides and supplements for courses in all four tested subjects. Districts have received general guidelines about optional remediation opportunities and future test dates. Teacher's guides are available at www.mde.k12.ms.us/acad/osa/satp.html.</p> <p>The state has also established and supported professional development programs specifically to help teachers understand how to interpret test results and to familiarize them with test materials and procedures.</p>								
Student preparation materials for exit exam	The state has developed an online item bank for teacher use, study guides, information booklets, a CD-ROM for practice tests, and Web resources. Practice tests available at www.mde.k12.ms.us/acad/osa/satpprac.html .								
Must districts provide remediation?	No, although the state expects and encourages districts to make remediation opportunities available								
Must students participate in remediation?	No								
State funding for remediation	None								
Are test items released?	No, but the state does make available sample test questions that have not been used on actual tests. The sample questions are available in public libraries and online at www.mde.k12.ms.us/acad/osa/satpprac.html .								
Exit exam used for No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?	Results from the first time students take the Algebra I and English II tests are reported in the student's 10 th grade year. If a student passes a test, such as the Algebra I test, for the first time in 8 th or 9 th grade, the results will be reported for NCLB accountability purposes when the student is in 10 th grade.								
Same cut score for graduation and NCLB?	<p>No, cut scores for proficient performance for NCLB are higher than the score of 300 required for graduation. To be considered proficient for NCLB, students must attain the following scores:</p> <table> <tr> <td>Algebra I:</td> <td>344</td> </tr> <tr> <td>English II:</td> <td>346</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Biology I:</td> <td>335</td> </tr> <tr> <td>U.S. History:</td> <td>347</td> </tr> </table>	Algebra I:	344	English II:	346	Biology I:	335	U.S. History:	347
Algebra I:	344								
English II:	346								
Biology I:	335								
U.S. History:	347								

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Initial pass rates, 2005 (SATP tests)

Percentage of Students Passing the SATP Tests on the First Try, 2005					
Student Group	English II	Writing Prompt	Algebra I	Biology I	U.S. History
All students	82.8%	91.0%	91.6%	91.8%	96.4%
White	91.2%	95.2%	96.0%	96.0%	96.0%
African American	73.9%	86.3%	86.7%	85.5%	93.9%
Latino	76.9%	95.3%	93.8%	93.8%	96.0%
Asian	88.4%	96.0%	96.0%	96.0%	96.0%
Native American	77.3%	92.9%	86.7%	80.0%	96.0%
English language learners	58.5%	96.0%	96.0%	87.6%	90.7%
Free or reduced-price lunch eligible	74.9%	87.0%	87.7%	86.9%	94.0%
Students with disabilities	42.1%	74.8%	78.0%	74.4%	87.1%
Passing score (scale of 100-500 in all subjects except writing, which has a scale of 0-4)	300	2	300	300	300

Cumulative pass rates, 2005

Not available

Major changes in exit exam policy

No

Evaluations of state exit exam

An alignment evaluation was done by an independent outside group.

State test contractor

Harcourt Assessment, Inc.

Web site for exit exam information

www.mde.k12.ms.us/acad/osa/satp.html

Nevada

High School Proficiency Examination (HSPE)

Type of test	Standards-based
Purpose	To ensure that all students receiving a regular diploma in Nevada have met the same level of performance in the core subjects of reading, writing, and mathematics (and science as of 2008)
Year first administered	The 1998 series exam, which is based on content standards adopted in 1998, was first administered in 2001.
Year diplomas first withheld	The class of 2003 was the first required to pass the 1998 series tests.
Subjects tested	Math, reading, writing. Science will be included in 2008 for 10 th grade students.
Types of questions	Multiple-choice, writing prompt/essay
Calculators permitted on math test	Only for students who are permitted to take the math test with accommodations
Grade first administered	10 th grade, spring semester
Grade(s) exam aligned to	State standards for grades 8-12
Number of retakes allowed before end of grade 12	Six
Retakes after grade 12	Following the summer after their planned graduation date, students who have completed all graduation requirements except passing an exit exam may enroll in an adult education program to continue to take the tests. They may take the tests as many times as needed with no limits on age, and if they pass they will still receive a regular high school diploma.
Alternate paths to graduation for general education students	Although the state does not offer any alternate routes to a regular diploma, students who do not pass the test can receive a certificate of completion or attendance.
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for students with disabilities	The state issues an adjusted diploma for students with disabilities who have met the graduation requirements specified in their individualized education program (IEP) but have not passed the High School Proficiency Examination (HSPE) or have passed using accommodations.
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for English language learners	No

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Cut score changes in past 18 months	The passing score for the math exam has been restored to 304, the original score recommended by the state board, after having been reduced at the request of the 2003 legislature.
Must private school students pass?	No, although private school students who want to become eligible for the Nevada Millennium Scholarship program must take and pass the HSPE. Many private schools administer the test to all students specifically so they can qualify for this scholarship. Private schools must provide the option of testing at no cost to the students.
Must home-schooled students pass?	No, although home-schooled students who want to become eligible for the Nevada Millennium Scholarship must take and pass the HSPE. Home-schooled students who choose to take the test must make arrangements with their local school to do so.
Test used by colleges or universities for undergraduate admissions?	Public universities and community colleges do not use the HSPE for admissions decisions or course placement. However, the Nevada Millennium Scholarship is open only to students who pass all the HSPEs and earn at least a 3.1 grade point average. The scholarship can be used within the Nevada University and Community College system and is worth a maximum of \$10,000. Additional scholarship requirements can be found at http://nevadatreasurer.gov/documents/Millennium/2005%20FACT%20SHEET.pdf .
Accept other states' test scores	No
Effects on local course offerings	Districts are adding more course offerings in math and science, and students are being encouraged to take additional coursework in math and science. Some districts are increasing course requirements to include four credits of math and three credits of science. Some districts are also mandating particular courses (such as algebra and geometry) as part of their academic program.
Accommodations for students with disabilities	<p>Students with disabilities are allowed to use a range of accommodations, such as the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More time on tests • Individual or small group administration • Use of calculators (only if specified in the student's IEP) • Dictionaries and glossaries • Oral administration of the exam • Tests and supporting materials in Braille and large print <p>Students who pass the exam using accommodations do not receive a regular high school diploma.</p>
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes

continues ➤

Accommodations for English language learners	<p>English language learners are allowed to take the HSPE with accommodations, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extra assessment time • Breaks during testing • Test administration in several sessions • Small group administration • Use of dictionaries and glossaries • Oral administration of the exam or exam instructions in English or the student's native language <p>Students who pass the exam using accommodations will not receive a regular high school diploma.</p>
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes
Teacher professional development related to exit exam	No
Student preparation materials for exit exam	<p>Study guides for students have been developed. The state has also supported the development of a new computer-based teaching and remediation aid called the Visual Math Dictionary for middle and high school math. This dictionary has been distributed to every middle school math classroom and is available to all students. It is also available at all high schools in the state. The state department of education is planning to update the dictionary and increase the high-school level components.</p>
Must districts provide remediation?	<p>The state requires districts to provide students who fail an exit exam twice with information to help prepare them for future test administrations, such as information about remediation requirements, optional remediation opportunities, future test dates, and implications for course taking.</p>
Must students participate in remediation?	No
State funding for remediation	<p>Total state funding for remediation programs was \$6,513,874 in 2005, but it is not known how much of this funding was spent on remediation specifically for the high school exit exam.</p>
Are test items released?	<p>The first released test forms became available online on September 1, 2005, at www.doe.nv.gov/statetesting/hsprofexam.html.</p>
Exit exam used for No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?	<p>Results from students' initial testing and first retest count for NCLB purposes. Nevada began using the results from the HSPE to meet NCLB requirements in 2003-04. The science test will also be used for NCLB purposes in 2007-08.</p>
Same cut score for graduation and NCLB?	Yes

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Grade 11 pass rates, 2005

Percentage of Grade 11 Students Passing, 2005*			
Student Group	Reading	Writing	Math
All students	82.8%	91.4%	63.5%
White	90.7%	95.6%	75.8%
African American	70.7%	86.0%	39.9%
Latino	69.7%	82.8%	44.8%
Asian	87.0%	92.6%	72.6%
Native American	77.8%	88.5%	49.4%
English language learners	57.9%	53.3%	35.5%
Free or reduced-price lunch eligible	71.8%	82.2%	42.6%
Students with disabilities	36.4%	58.2%	15.3%
Migrant students	NA	41.5%	NA
Passing score (scale of 100-500, except for writing, which has a scale of 0-12.0)**			
	251	7	304

*The pass rates for the reading and math tests represent the percentage of students passing after spring testing of 11th grade, which means they had two opportunities to pass—spring of 10th grade and spring of 11th grade. The pass rates for the writing test represent the percentage of 11th graders passing the first time they took the test.

**Information on the writing score scale was obtained from [www.doe.nv.gov/statetesting/hsprofexam.attachment/303336/Tab_5_HSPE_Writing_2005_9\[1\].15.05.pdf](http://www.doe.nv.gov/statetesting/hsprofexam.attachment/303336/Tab_5_HSPE_Writing_2005_9[1].15.05.pdf).

Note: The performance levels for the exam are exceeds standard, meets standard, approaching standard, and developing/emergent.

Cumulative pass rates, 2005

Percentage of Students Passing by the End of 12 th Grade	
All students	86.9%
White	94.4%
African American	86.9%
Latino	86.0%
Asian	92.9%
Native American	91.2%
English language learners	83.4%
Free or reduced-price lunch eligible	NA
Students with disabilities	86.9%

Major changes in exit exam policy	No
Evaluations of state exit exam	The state has not done a full evaluation of the HSPE, but the Center for Assessment at the University of Nevada–Las Vegas has done an alignment study of the HSPE reading and math tests.
State test contractor	Measured Progress
Web site for exit exam information	www.doe.nv.gov/statetesting/hsprofexam.html



New Jersey

High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA)

Type of test	Standards-based
Purpose	To measure and assure that all students possess the basic skills needed to function politically, economically, and socially in a democratic society
Year first administered	<p>2002 for the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA)</p> <p>The HSPA replaced the High School Proficiency Test (HSPT11), which was first administered in 1983 and became a graduation requirement for all public high school students in New Jersey who entered the 9th grade on or after September 1, 1991. The class of 2000 was the last required to pass the HSPT11. Students who were in 11th grade in 2002 were the first to take the HSPA.</p>
Year diplomas first withheld	The class of 2003 was the first required to pass the HSPA to obtain a diploma.
Subjects tested	Language arts literacy and mathematics (and science in 2007).
Types of questions	Multiple-choice, short-answer, writing prompt/essay
Calculators permitted on math test	Yes
Grade first administered	11 th
Grade(s) exam aligned to	11 th
Number of retakes allowed before end of grade 12	Two (students who are retained have additional opportunities)
Retakes after grade 12	No limit on retest opportunities; students in Adult High Schools are also eligible to take the HSPA.
Alternate paths to graduation for general education students	<p>Students who fail one or both sections of the HSPA may go through a Special Review Assessment (SRA) process, which offers them an alternative way to demonstrate their mastery of the required skills. In 2004, 18% of students who failed the HSPA undertook the SRA process, while taking HSPA retest administrations in the interim.</p> <p>In addition, students who have met all other graduation requirements except passing the HSPA can either return to school at testing time the following year and retake the HSPA, or pass the GED test.</p>

Alternate paths to graduation specifically for students with disabilities	Some students with disabilities are exempt from passing, but not from taking, the HSPA, based on their individualized education program (IEP). Students who are designated as “IEP-exempt from passing” must take the exempt portions of the test at least once, but their scores will not affect their graduation status. Students with severe disabilities take the Alternate Proficiency Assessment instead of the HSPA and can earn a regular diploma if they fulfill all other requirements for graduation.
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for English language learners	<p>English language learners may demonstrate proficiency in the required content areas by completing the SRA process, which is also available in Spanish and two additional languages other than English. To be eligible for an SRA in the native language, a student must have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Scored below the state-established cutoff score on one of the state-approved English language tests; b) Participated in a bilingual, English as a Second Language, or English language services program for two consecutive years or fewer before the HSPA testing; or c) Attended school in the U.S. for three consecutive years or fewer before the date of the HSPA. <p>English language learners who take the SRA must also pass the English Fluency test to receive a high school diploma.</p>
Cut score changes in past 18 months	No
Must private school students pass?	No
Must home-schooled students pass?	No
Test used by colleges or universities for undergraduate admissions?	No
Accept other states’ test scores	No
Effects on local course offerings	The state has not studied this question in detail; however the intended effect of the HSPA—in combination with the Core Curriculum Content Standards, which remain the basis for public education in New Jersey and for all statewide assessments—is to promote course offerings and classroom instruction that develop higher-level, critical thinking skills.
Accommodations for students with disabilities	<p>The state allows the following accommodations for students with disabilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional time • Use of a scribe • Reading aloud of directions • Reading aloud of items • Special seating or lighting arrangements • Use of large face calculators • Extra breaks • Tests in Braille and large print
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes

Accommodations for English language learners	English language learners may use accommodations such as extra time, small group testing, translated directions, and bilingual dictionaries.
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes
Teacher professional development related to exit exam	The state has supported programs to help teachers administer and prepare students for the HSPA, including training in how to interpret test results and training in test administration. Materials include a <i>District Test Coordinator Manual</i> and a <i>Score Interpretation Manual</i> .
Student preparation materials for exit exam	The state provides a <i>Student/Teacher Preparation Manual</i> , which explains and describes the test and includes sample test items for each content area.
Must districts provide remediation?	The state requires school districts to provide students who fail the exit exam with remediation, as well as information to help them with future administrations of the test.
Must students participate in remediation?	Although the state does not directly require students to participate, the state does require districts to provide remediation and authorizes districts to make placement decisions accordingly, in consultation with the student's parents or guardian.
State funding for remediation	None
Are test items released?	<p>Sample test questions and sample student responses are released each year and posted on the state department of education Web site at www.nj.gov/njded/assessment/hs/.</p> <p>In addition, selected writing prompts and sample student responses are released each year in a writing handbook, which is made public as part of the HSPA score reporting.</p>
Exit exam used for No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?	The results of the first administration of the HSPA in grade 11 in language arts literacy and math count for determining adequate yearly progress under NCLB. The science test results will count starting in 2007.
Same cut score for graduation and NCLB?	Yes

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Initial pass rates, 2005

Percentage of Students Passing on the First Try, 2005		
Student Group	Language Arts	Math
All students	83.2%	75.5%
White	91.0%	85.3%
African American	75.6%	46.8%
Latino	66.4%	56.9%
Asian	87.8%	89.2%
Native American	80.6%	66.4%
Other ethnic or multiethnic	79.0%	70.0%
English language learners	22.5%	34.6%
Free or reduced-price lunch eligible	62.9%	46.2%
Students with disabilities	74.8%	49.9%
Passing score (scale of 100-300)	200	200

Note: The performance levels for the HSPA are advanced proficient (scores of 250-300), proficient (scores of 200-249), and partially proficient (scores of 100-199).

Cumulative pass rates, 2005

Not available

Major changes in exit exam policy

Although no changes have been made to the current high school exit exam system, the state is actively participating in the American Diploma Project and other activities intended to raise the level of student performance and increase the rigor of the state's assessments. The state is phasing out the Special Review Assessment alternative for satisfying the exam requirement (see alternate paths above) in favor of other means of addressing the needs of students who fail to demonstrate proficiency through the HSPA, although no specific timeline for doing so has been set.

Evaluations of state exit exam

An evaluation was conducted by Achieve, Inc. (see www.achieve.org/files/TestGraduation-FinalReport.pdf).

State test contractor

Measurement Incorporated in Durham, NC

Web site for exit exam informationwww.nj.gov/njded/assessment/hs/



New Mexico



New Mexico High School Competency Examination (NMHSCE)

Type of test	Minimum competency
Purpose	The New Mexico High School Competency Examination (NMHSCE) is a minimum competency exam required for graduation.
Year first administered	1987-88
Year diplomas first withheld	The class of 1990 was the first required to pass all subjects of the exit exam before receiving a diploma.
Subjects tested	Reading, language arts, composition, mathematics, science, social studies
Types of questions	Multiple-choice, short-answer, writing composition, extended performance tasks
Calculators permitted on math test	Yes (but only on sections that do not address computation as part of the test construct)
Grade first administered	10 th
Grade(s) exam aligned to	8 th grade standards in reading, language arts, math, science, and social studies
Number of retakes allowed before end of grade 12	Three retakes. Students initially take the test once in the 10 th grade and may retake it in the spring of 11 th grade. They have two more opportunities to retake it by the end of 12 th grade.
Retakes after grade 12	Two retake opportunities each year for up to five years after 12 th grade
Alternate paths to graduation for general education students	<p>The state does not allow students to submit scores from other tests to replace its exit exam, but it does allow districts to grant waivers of the exam requirement. The waiver or appeal must be initiated by the school principal to the district superintendent and referred to the local school board. If the waiver is approved by the local school board, the district superintendent submits a waiver request documenting local school board approval to the state Secretary of Education for consideration and approval. The waiver request must include documentation of the student's record of having met all other graduation requirements.</p> <p>Students who have met all graduation requirements except passing the exit exam may be granted a certificate of completion indicating the number of credits earned and the grade completed.</p>
Alternate paths to graduation	There are three pathways to the diploma in New Mexico. Each pathway has

specifically for students with disabilities	<p>specific requirements that students must follow in order to earn a standard diploma. The pathways are Standard, Career Readiness, and Ability.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standard: Students must meet the district’s graduation requirements that apply to all students. • Career Readiness: Students must take the NMHSCE and meet a competency level determined by the student’s individualized education program (IEP) team. • Ability: Students must take either the NMHSCE or the New Mexico Alternate Assessment and meet a competency level determined by the IEP team. <p>Like all other students, students with disabilities who complete 12th grade without having passed the exit exam may receive a certificate of completion. However, a follow-up plan of action must be completed in order to provide a free, appropriate public education to these students as they pursue the process of meeting graduation requirements.</p>
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for English language learners	No, but English language learners are eligible for the same waiver and certificate options as general education students
Cut score changes in past 18 months	No
Must private school students pass?	No
Must home-schooled students pass?	No
Test used by colleges or universities for undergraduate admissions?	<p>Students can be admitted to public universities in New Mexico without having a high school diploma, but they cannot receive financial aid without a diploma or GED. A certificate of completion does not meet the requirements for financial aid.</p> <p>In addition, some universities and most community colleges use the exit exams for course placement.</p>
Accept other states’ test scores	Results of another state’s test would be part of the portfolio of information submitted to the Secretary of Education in a waiver request and considered on a case-by-case basis.
Effects on local course offerings	No research has been compiled to address this question.
Accommodations for students with disabilities	Information regarding accommodations for the NMHSCE for the 2005-06 school year can be found at www.ped.state.nm.us/div/acc.assess/assess/dl/SBA_procedures_manual/2005-2006%20Procedures%20Manual-Final.pdf . The New Mexico Public Education Department expects to publish a revised version of its Procedures Manual in August 2006, which would contain some small changes in accommodations expectations.
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes
Accommodations for English language learners	The 2005-06 Procedures Manual, available on the Web site noted above, contains accommodations guidance for English language learners.

Teacher professional development related to exit exam	Information about the NMHSCE is provided to District Test Coordinators (DTCs) during regional fall and spring training sessions. DTCs are then responsible for training School Test Coordinators, who train relevant school staff.
Student preparation materials for exit exam	The New Mexico Public Education Department publishes an NMHSCE Domain Specifications document, which can be used by teachers for instructional purposes.
Must districts provide remediation?	Districts are not required by regulation to provide remediation. However, the expectation is that all districts must address student failure on the NMHSCE through remediation. For students with disabilities, the Special Education Bureau has provided training on remediation issues several times.
Must students participate in remediation?	No
State funding for remediation	None is provided for general education students. For students with disabilities, a free, appropriate public education must continue to be provided and is funded by both state and federal sources, depending upon the specifics of the situation.
Are test items released?	No
Exit exam used for No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?	No
Same cut score for graduation and NCLB?	Not applicable
Initial pass rates, 2005	

Percentage of Students Passing on the First Try, 2005							
	Reading	Language Arts	Writing Composition	Math	Science	Social Studies	All Six Subtests
All students	90.5%	81.6%	98.3%	82.9%	79.4%	76.0%	63.3%
White	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	81.2%
African American	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	53.9%
Latino	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	54.7%
Asian	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	75.3%
Native American	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	44.3%
English language learners	77.5%	64.7%	93.5%	67.7%	59.8%	56.8%	39.0%
Free or reduced-price lunch eligible	80.9%	68.9%	95.1%	71.8%	66.7%	64.1%	47.4%
Students with disabilities	66.1%	47.9%	92.0%	51.0%	51.2%	50.3%	29.8%
Passing score (on a varying scale*)	175	175	3	175	175	175	
*The tests, except for writing, are scored on a scale of 0 to approximately 300 points, depending on the particular forms used each year. The writing text is scored using a six-point rubric. The performance levels for the NMHSCE are pass and fail.							

Cumulative pass rates, 2005	Not available. Cumulative pass rates are tracked at the district but not the state level.
Major changes in exit exam policy	No
Evaluations of state exit exam	An item review of the NMHSCE was conducted every year from 1987 to 1998. The last item review was conducted in 2003-04.
State test contractor	CTB/McGraw Hill was the original contractor. Harcourt will be the contractor for NMHSCE in 2007.
Web site for exit exam information	<p>www.ped.state.nm.us</p> <p>On the main Web page, place the cursor on the Programs menu at the top of the page and drag the cursor down to PED Programs A-G. When another pull down menu appears to the right side, place the cursor on the Assessment and Evaluation link and click. In the Assessment and Accountability Division Page, a link will appear at the bottom of the green box entitled, "2005-2006 District Test Coordinator Training Site." Click here for general information about the NMHSCE (pp. 52-55), as well as information on the test window (p. 29), make-up sessions (p. 40), scoring (p. 56), waivers (p. 57), and the Spanish NMHSCE (p. 85).</p>



New York

Regents Examinations

Type of test	End-of-course (achievement tests aligned to New York state learning standards)
Purpose	<p>The Regents Examinations provide schools with a basis for evaluating the quality of instruction and learning. The exams are used by school personnel to identify major learning goals, and they offer teachers and students a guide to important skills and concepts. The Regents Examinations also provide students, parents, counselors, administrators, college admissions officers, and employers with objective and easily understood achievement information that can be used to make sound educational and vocational decisions. Passing scores on the Regents Examinations in English, mathematics, science, and social studies satisfy the state testing requirements for a high school diploma.</p>
Year first administered	1878
Year diplomas first withheld	<p>The class of 2000 was the first required to pass the revised Regents Examinations to graduate, but these students only had to pass the English subject test. Since 2003, students have been required to pass five Regents Examinations to graduate.</p> <p>Students with disabilities will not be required to achieve the same scores as other students until 2009-10.</p>
Subjects tested	English language arts, languages other than English, mathematics, science, and social studies
Types of questions	Multiple-choice, short-answer, writing prompt/essay, and, in the case of earth science, extended performance tasks
Calculators permitted on math test	<p>All students taking the Mathematics A Regents Examination, which is a high school graduation requirement, must have a scientific calculator. Students taking this examination may also use graphing calculators without symbol manipulation.</p> <p>Students taking the Mathematics B Examination, which is used to determine whether students receive a Regents Diploma with an advanced designation, must have a graphing calculator without symbol manipulation.</p>
Grade first administered	Varies, depending on when students complete the course associated with a particular Regents Examination. In the case of a science Regents Examination, only students who have also met the laboratory requirement (1,200 minutes) may take the test.
Grade(s) exam aligned to	Grades 9-12 of the New York State Learning Standards

Number of retakes allowed before end of grade 12	Most Regents Examinations are administered three times a year (January, June, and August). Students may retake the examinations during each of these three administrations.
Retakes after grade 12	Yes
Alternate paths to graduation for general education students	<p>Students who have completed the course in a subject tested by a Regents Examination may substitute a minimum acceptable score on a Department-approved alternative examination (such as the SAT II, Advanced Placement, or International Baccalaureate exam) for a Regents exam score.</p> <p>An appeals process is available to students who have entered 9th grade in September 2005 or later, have passed certain courses to prepare for a Regents Examination, and have earned a 65 course average, but whose highest score on the Regents exam is within three points of the 65 passing score. These students may appeal for permission to graduate with a local or Regents Diploma using this lower score.</p>
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for students with disabilities	<p>Students with disabilities who enroll in 9th grade prior to September 2010 and who fail the Regents Comprehensive Examinations may still receive a regular diploma if they pass the Regents Competency Tests, an assessment available for students with disabilities.</p> <p>Students with disabilities can also receive an individualized education program (IEP) certificate if they have achieved the goals and objectives in their IEP but have not passed the Regents Competency Tests.</p>
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for English language learners	No
Cut score changes in past 18 months specifically for English language learners	In October 2005, the Board of Regents approved a plan to phase in, over four years, a passing score of 65 for graduation purposes. The current cut score is 65 for a Regents Diploma and 55 for a local diploma, but general education students entering 9 th grade in 2008 must pass all five required Regents Examinations with a score of 65 or above.
Must private school students pass?	Students in accredited private schools must pass the Regents exams to receive a diploma.
Must home-schooled students pass?	Home-schooled students are not required to take the Regents exams but do not receive high school diplomas. If home-schooled students complete an individual home instruction program for four years and the superintendent approves their program as being equivalent to four years of high school, these students receive a letter of equivalence.
Test used by colleges or universities for undergraduate admissions?	Some public community colleges and universities use the Regents exam results to determine admissions, scholarship eligibility, and course placement. Discussions have occurred between state K-12 education and higher education officials about linking the content of the examinations to standards for what students need to know to enter college. The City University of New York (CUNY) currently accepts a score of 75 on the Regents English and mathematics examinations as admissions tests. The university is measuring the progress of students who use this route against students who use the SAT and the CUNY Freshman Skills Assessment Test.

Accept other states' test scores	No
Effects on local course offerings	Exams are tied to prescribed courses of study.
Accommodations for students with disabilities	Principals must ensure that students with disabilities receive the testing accommodations specified in their IEPs or section 504 plans when they take state examinations. Authorized accommodations for students with disabilities include large-type exams, Braille exams, reader-administered exams, and reference materials for Regents Examinations.
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes
Accommodations for English language learners	<p>The state allows accommodations for English language learners, including the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time extension • Tests administered in a separate location • A third reading of the listening selection (only for the Comprehensive English Examination) • Bilingual dictionaries and glossaries <p>Except for the Comprehensive English Regents Examination, the state provides translated editions of the examinations in Chinese, Haitian-Creole, Russian, Spanish, or Korean. Students may use the English and native language editions simultaneously. English proficiency is required to graduate.</p>
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes
Teacher professional development related to exit exam	New York State has supported or established specific professional development programs to help teachers administer and prepare students for the Regents Examinations. These include familiarizing teachers with the content of the exams and training them on how to interpret test results. The state has also developed curriculum and informational guides.
Student preparation materials for exit exam	The state posts all nonrestricted state exams and related scoring materials on the Department of Education Web site after the exams have been administered.
Must districts provide remediation?	School districts are required to provide students who fail a Regents Examination with academic intervention services.
Must students participate in remediation?	No
State funding for remediation	Federal Title I funds may be used to support remediation programs. It is up to schools to determine whether they want to use Title I funds for this purpose.
Are test items released?	After each administration of the Regents Examinations in Comprehensive English, Mathematics A, and Mathematics B, the tests and related scoring materials are posted at www.nysedregents.org/testing/hsregents.html .

Exit exam used for No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?	Since 2002-03, the final retest opportunity of the Regents Examinations has been used to meet the high school testing requirements of NCLB. The science examination will also be used for NCLB purposes in 2007-08.					
Same cut score for graduation and NCLB?	Yes					
Initial pass rates, 2005	Not available at the state level					
Cumulative pass rates, 2005						
	Percentage of Students Passing After Four Years of High School, 2005					
	Student Group	Comprehensive English	Math	Science	Global History & Geography	U.S. History & Government
	All students	86%	87%	88%	85%	83%
	White	92%	93%	94%	91%	90%
	African American	76%	76%	76%	73%	70%
	Latino	73%	74%	75%	72%	68%
	Asian	88%	92%	91%	90%	87%
	Native American	78%	80%	80%	76%	72%
	English language learners	53%	65%	61%	61%	55%
	Free or reduced-price lunch eligible	77%	79%	79%	76%	72%
	Students with disabilities	60%	67%	57%	50%	50%
	Passing score (scale of 0-100)	55	55	55	55	55
	Note: The table shows the performance of the group of students that first entered 9 th grade in 2001-02 after this group had completed four years of high school.					
	Note: The performance levels for the Regents Examinations are pass with distinction (score of 85-100), pass (65-84), and low pass (55-64).					
Major changes in exit exam policy	No					
Evaluations of state exit exam	An evaluation has been conducted and is available at www.emsc.nysed.gov/osa/assesspubs/repubs.html .					
State test contractor	No contractor as of June 2006					
Web site for exit exam information	www.emsc.nysed.gov/osa/					



North Carolina



North Carolina High School Competency Tests and Test of Computer Skills Multiple-Choice and Performance

Type of test	Standards-based as of 2005-06, but five end-of-course exams will be added in 2006-07
Purpose	To assure that graduates of the state's public high schools and nonpublic schools supervised by the state board possess the skills and knowledge necessary to function independently and successfully in assuming the responsibilities of citizenship
Year first administered	<p>The state reports that it has undertaken many changes to develop a better form of assessment.</p> <p>The North Carolina High School Competency Tests were first administered in 1978-79 and the Computer Skills Test in 1996-97. A new Web-based version of the computer skills test will replace the old computer test and will be available in 2006-07 for entering 9th graders.</p> <p>Additionally, students entering 9th grade in 2006-07 who are following the college/university preparation, college/technical preparation, and career preparation courses of study will be held to new standards, which include passing five end-of-course tests and completing a graduation project.</p>
Year diplomas first withheld	1982 (for competency tests in reading and mathematics) 2001 (for computer skills test)
Subjects tested	<p>Reading comprehension and mathematics (competency tests); and computer proficiency (computer skills test)</p> <p>In addition, students entering 9th grade in 2006-07 will be required to pass end-of-course exams in Algebra I, English I, U.S. history, civics and economics, and biology.</p>
Types of questions	Both the competency tests and computer skills test include multiple-choice items, but only the computer skills test includes performance tasks and open-ended questions.
Calculators permitted on math test	Yes; the math test contains both a calculator inactive part and a calculator active part.
Grade first administered	8 th grade for both the competency tests and computer skills test
Grade(s) exam aligned to	8 th grade

Number of retakes allowed before end of grade 12	<p>One retake per year for the competency and computer skills tests. In their senior year, students have an additional retake opportunity during the last month of the school year.</p> <p>For the new end-of-course tests, students will have a maximum of two retest opportunities before completing 12th grade.</p>
Retakes after grade 12	<p>Students who have met all graduation requirements except passing the competency or computer skills tests may retake the tests after completing 12th grade and still receive a regular diploma. Students are allowed to return to school and take advantage of remedial instruction and additional retesting until they reach age 21, or beyond if the district allows it.</p>
Alternate paths to graduation for general education students	<p>North Carolina students may use scores from the following alternate tests to meet the state competency test requirements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • North Carolina grade 8 end-of-grade tests • PSAT, SAT, ACT, and College Board tests (such as ACT PLAN, ACT COMPASS, and ACCUPLACER) • Standardized tests, such as the California Achievement Test 5th edition, Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, Terra Nova, and Stanford Achievement Test 9 • Nationally normed assessments approved by the state Department of Public Instruction <p>When nationally normed tests are not available, students may use any of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grade 7 end-of-grade tests in reading and mathematics • North Carolina Algebra I end-of-course test to meet the math competency requirement • North Carolina English I end-of-course test to meet the reading competency requirement <p>Students may use a combination of measures to meet the competency test requirements, but they still must pass the computer skills test.</p> <p>The state does not have a process for requesting a waiver or appeal of the exit exam requirement. Students who do not receive a regular diploma may be awarded a certificate of achievement.</p>
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for students with disabilities	<p>Students with disabilities who are following the occupational course of study (OCS) are not required to pass the competency test to receive a diploma. Only certain students with disabilities may participate in OCS, as determined by each student's individualized education program (IEP) team.</p> <p>In addition, an IEP team or section 504 committee may determine that a student with disabilities participating in the college/university, college/technical, or career preparation courses of study will not participate in the competency tests. However, these students will not receive a diploma but instead will receive a graduation certificate available only for students with disabilities.</p> <p>Students with disabilities must still pass the computer skills assessment.</p>
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for English language learners	<p>No</p>

Cut score changes in past 18 months	No
Must private school students pass?	Yes. All students who are pursuing the college/university, college/technical, or career preparation courses of study must pass the competency tests to receive a diploma.
Must home-schooled students pass?	Yes. All students who are pursuing the college/university, college/technical, or career preparation courses of study must pass the competency tests to receive a diploma.
Test used by colleges or universities for undergraduate admissions?	No
Accept other states' test scores	No
Effects on local course offerings	Research indicates that instructional time has decreased in non-tested areas of science and social studies at the elementary and middle grades. Principals are encouraging teachers to devote additional time to the tested areas of mathematics and reading.
Accommodations for students with disabilities	<p>Students with disabilities may use a wide variety of accommodations on the competency tests. Among the many accommodations permitted are the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assistive technology • Braille or large print test materials • Testing over multiple sessions • Testing in a separate room • Extended testing time • Reading aloud of math test only by an administrator • Answers marked in the test booklet <p>Additional accommodations are listed in the state publication <i>Testing Students with Disabilities</i>.</p>
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes
Accommodations for English language learners	<p>English language learners may use the following accommodations on the competency tests:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English/native language dictionary or electronic translator • Testing over multiple sessions • Testing in a separate room • Extended testing time • Reading aloud of the test to self • Reading aloud of the math test only by an administrator <p>Additional details about testing policies for English language learners are found in the state publication, <i>Guidelines for Testing Students Identified as Limited English Proficient</i>.</p>

Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes
Teacher professional development related to exit exam	The state has supported programs to help teachers administer and prepare students for the competency tests, including training in how to teach test-taking skills and training to familiarize teachers with the content of the tests.
Student preparation materials for exit exam	The state has developed preparation and remediation programs and materials for students, including lesson plans to prepare students for the tests and curriculum and information guides.
Must districts provide remediation?	Schools are required to provide remedial instruction to students who have not passed the competency or computer skills tests. These students are also provided with information to help them prepare for future administrations of the test, including information about remediation requirements and future test dates.
Must students participate in remediation?	Yes
State funding for remediation	Districts are required to use existing funds to provide focused assistance. Nearly all state and federal funds, through the waiver process, can be used for this purpose.
Are test items released?	Each high school receives Instructional Notebooks for providing remedial instruction to students who have not passed the competency or computer skills tests. Sample items are included in the notebooks.
Exit exam used for No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?	No. The current exams are aligned to 8 th grade standards and do not satisfy the high school testing requirements of NCLB.
Same cut score for graduation and NCLB?	Not applicable

continues ➤

Initial pass rates, 2005

Percentage of Students Passing on the First Try, 2005			
Student Group	NCHSCT Reading Level III	NCHSCT Math Level III	Computer Skills Test
All students	88.9%	84.8%	80.9%
White	94.3%	91.5%	88.8%
African American	80.5%	72.3%	69.3%
Latino	77.9%	78.1%	62.5%
Asian	91.2%	93.5%	83.1%
Native American	84.3%	80.5%	78.1%
English language learners	56.2%	64.8%	40.5%
Free or reduced-price lunch eligible	80.8%	74.8%	70.5%
Students with disabilities	64.3%	58.0%	54.4%
Passing score (scale of 231-290 for reading, 235-310 for math, and 18-82 for computer skills)			
	254	261	47 on multiple choice test; 49 on performance test

Note: The performance levels for the math and reading competency tests are achievement levels I, II, III, and IV.

Cumulative pass rates, 2005

Percentage of Students Passing by the End of 12 th Grade, 2005		
	Competency Tests of Reading and Math	Computer Skills Test
All students	78.0%	80.9%
White	87.4%	88.8%
African American	63.3%	69.3%
Latino	61.0%	62.5%
Asian	84.0%	83.1%
Native American	70.7%	78.1%
English language learners	35.7%	40.5%
Free or reduced-price lunch eligible	64.7%	70.5%
Students with disabilities	42.4%	54.4%

Note: Combined pass rates for students who have passed all the required tests are not available.

Major changes in exit exam policy	As noted above, the state will add a requirement in 2006-07 for high school students following the college/university, college/technical, or career preparation paths to pass five end-of-course tests.
Evaluations of state exit exam	Yes, but results are not available at present
State test contractor	The state has a contract with North Carolina State University to provide assistance with the development of the competency and computer skills tests.
Web site for exit exam information	<p>www.ncpublicschools.org/accountability/parents/highschool (for information about the competency tests)</p> <p>www.ncpublicschools.org/accountability/parents/middle (for information about the computer skills tests)</p> <p>www.ncpublicschools.org/accountability/policies/highschoolexit (for information about the new high school exit standards and end-of-course exams)</p>



Ohio

Ohio Graduation Tests (OGT)

Type of test	Standards-based
Purpose	The assessments are used to meet the NCLB testing requirement and as a high school exit exam.
Year first administered	The reading and math Ohio Graduation Tests (OGT) were first administered to 10 th grade students in 2004. The science, social studies, and writing tests were first administered to 10 th grade students in 2005. The first administration that counted toward graduation occurred in March 2005.
Year diplomas first withheld	Ohio currently withholds diplomas on the basis of the 9 th Grade Proficiency Test. The class of 2007 will be the first required to pass the OGT.
Subjects tested	Reading, writing, mathematics, science, social studies
Types of questions	All the tests consist of multiple-choice, short-answer, and extended-response questions except the writing test, which consists of two writing prompts, a short-answer question, and multiple-choice questions.
Calculators permitted on math test	Yes
Grade first administered	10 th
Grade(s) exam aligned to	10 th grade academic content standards
Number of retakes allowed before end of grade 12	Six. After taking the tests for the first time in the spring of 10 th grade, students may retake them in the summer and every fall and spring until the end of grade 12.
Retakes after grade 12	Students can continue taking the OGT, with no limitations on age or number of retakes, until they pass and receive a regular diploma.
Alternate paths to graduation for general education students	<p>Although the state does not accept substitute tests or offer alternative diplomas or certificates, it does have an appeals process. If approved, the appeal allows the student to have an oral administration of all tests except the writing test. To qualify for an appeal a student must meet all of these criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Be a second semester senior who has taken and failed the tests beforeb) Have participated in intervention programs offeredc) Be an English language learner or have at least a 2.5 grade point average out of 4.0. in the courses covered by the tests not yet passed <p>In addition, students graduating after September 15, 2006, may meet the exit exam requirement if they pass four of the five tests and meet all other graduation criteria.</p>

Alternate paths to graduation specifically for students with disabilities	<p>Students with disabilities may take the OGT alternative assessment, which consists of a classroom-based collection of evidence and is available in all five subjects.</p> <p>In some cases, students with disabilities may be exempted from the consequences of the tests by their individualized education program (IEP) team.</p> <p>Students with disabilities may also go through the same appeals process as all other students.</p>
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for English language learners	No, although English language learners may go through the same appeals process as all other students
Cut score changes in past 18 months	No
Must private school students pass?	Students in chartered private schools must take and pass the OGT, but those in non-chartered private schools do not have to take the OGT. However, all private school students who seek a diploma with the state seal must take and pass the OGT. The state seal is required by universities, the military, and some vocational schools.
Must home-schooled students pass?	Home-schooled students have the option of taking the tests, but their participation is not required. However, all home-schooled students who seek a diploma with the state seal must take and pass the OGT. The state seal is required by universities, the military, and some vocational schools.
Test used by colleges or universities for undergraduate admissions?	No
Accept other states' test scores	No
Effects on local course offerings	Students are encouraged to take more classes in tested subjects. There is a greater emphasis on writing, reading, and mathematics.
Accommodations for students with disabilities	<p>The Ohio Administrative Code defines allowable accommodations as those that meet the following four criteria. The accommodation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be typically afforded to the student for classroom and districtwide tests • Cannot alter the content or structure of the test • Cannot change what the test is intended to measure • Cannot change or enhance the student's response <p>A student's IEP team determines which specific accommodations will be permitted and whether the student may be exempted from having to pass the OGT.</p> <p>Ohio Graduation Tests are also available in Braille and large print and on English audio CD.</p>
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes

Accommodations for English language learners	<p>English language learners are allowed to use the following accommodations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional time of up to one full day for each test • Dictionaries • Foreign language CD's of the test (available in Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Somali, and Spanish) • An oral translator for the math, science, and social studies tests (but not for the reading and writing tests, which must be completed in English) <p>English language learners who have been in the U.S. for less than three years and score below proficient in reading and writing may use additional accommodations.</p>
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes
Teacher professional development related to exit exam	<p>The state has supported programs that familiarize teachers with the content of the OGT and train them in how to teach test-taking skills, interpret test results, and score open-ended items on practice tests.</p> <p>The state has also developed curriculum guides based on the exams, lesson plans to prepare students for the tests, information guides explaining the tests, and other teacher resources. (See www.ode.state.oh.us/proficiency/ogt/Tools_For_Teachers_2004-2005.asp.)</p>
Student preparation materials for exit exam	<p>The state has developed practice tests to help students pass the exams. These tests are available at www.ode.state.oh.us/proficiency/samples/ninth_practice.asp. Another Web site helps prepare students for the exit exam (www.ode.state.oh.us/proficiency/ogt/OGT_Website_for_Students.asp). All 9th graders receive copies of the <i>OGT Student and Family Guide</i>.</p>
Must districts provide remediation?	<p>When students fail the exit exam, districts are required to provide information about remediation requirements, optional remediation, future test dates, implications for course taking, and a graduation checklist.</p> <p>In addition, the lowest-performing districts in the state—those in academic watch, in academic emergency, or with a three-year average graduation rate of 75% or less—must use practice tests aligned to the graduation tests in the fall with their 9th grade students. These districts must also provide interventions for students who demonstrate unsatisfactory progress.</p>
Must students participate in remediation?	<p>Students must participate in 10 hours of remediation in the content area not yet passed before they are allowed to take the summer OGT.</p> <p>Remediation is available but not mandatory for students who have completed high school but not yet passed the OGT.</p>
State funding for remediation	<p>The state does not provide funding for remediation for students in 10th and 11th grades. Districts receive partial reimbursement for students who have completed high school but have yet to pass the OGT. Districts have the option of charging students for remediation services for which the district is not reimbursed.</p>
Are test items released?	<p>All test questions, with sample student responses, are released each year and are available at www.ode.state.oh.us/proficiency/OGT/default.asp.</p>

Exit exam used for No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?	Since 2005, reading and math scores from students' initial testing in 10 th grade have been used to determine adequate yearly progress under NCLB. The science OGT will be used to meet NCLB science testing requirements in 2007.																																																																																																					
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Passing scores, 2006 (number of points needed to pass out of total points)**	17.5 out of 48	17.5 out of 46	25.0 out of 48	23.0 out of 48	21.0 out of 48																																																																																																	
*Data for these subgroups of students come from Local Report Cards rather than from state assessment reports, the source of the racial/ethnic subgroup data.																																																																																																						
**The OGT has five performance levels: advanced, accelerated, proficient, basic, and limited. Students must score at the proficient level to pass for graduation purposes. The passing scores shown in the table represent the number of points that students must score out of the total points for each section of the test to reach the proficient level.																																																																																																						
Cumulative pass rates, 2005	Not available																																																																																																					
Major changes in exit exam policy	No																																																																																																					
Evaluations of state exit exam	As of June 2006, the OGT was being reviewed as part of the No Child Left Behind Act peer review process.																																																																																																					
State test contractor	Measurement Incorporated																																																																																																					
Web site for exit exam information	www.ode.state.oh.us/proficiency/OGT/default.asp																																																																																																					



Oklahoma

End-of-Instruction (EOI) Exams

Type of test	End-of-instruction (EOI), criterion-referenced examinations aligned to the Priority Academic Student Skills (PASS), which are the state’s academic content standards
Purpose	<p>To assess students’ mastery of state content standards. In addition, the Algebra I and English II end-of-course exams are used to meet NCLB requirements.</p> <p>The Oklahoma Achieving Classroom Excellence Act (ACE) of 2006 requires that beginning with students entering 9th grade in the 2008-09 school year, every student shall demonstrate mastery of the state academic content standards in the following subject areas in order to graduate from a public high school with a standard diploma:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Algebra I;2. English II; and3. Two of the following five:<ol style="list-style-type: none">a) Algebra IIb) Biology Ic) English IIId) Geometrye) United States history
Year diplomas first withheld	2012
Subjects tested	<p>Currently, all Oklahoma students must take four EOI exams—English II (with a writing component), Algebra I, Biology I, and U. S. history—but not as a graduation requirement. Legislation enacted in 2006, based on recommendations made by the state’s ACE task force, requires three new EOIs to be created: English III (with a writing component), geometry, and Algebra II.</p> <p>Students will be required, by 2012, to pass a minimum of four out of seven EOI exams in selected subject areas to receive a diploma. Two of the four exams that students must pass are English II and Algebra I.</p>
Types of questions	Multiple-choice, plus writing prompts for English II and English III
Calculators permitted on mathematics test	This is currently being considered.
Grade first administered	Varies. Students will first take the exam at the end of each assessed course, whenever the course is taken.
Grade(s) exam aligned to	High school standards

Number of retakes allowed before end of grade 12	Students who do not score at least at the satisfactory level will be afforded the opportunity to retake each test up to three times each calendar year until they achieve at least at the satisfactory level.
Retakes after grade 12	To be determined; the ACE Steering Committee will make recommendations to the state board of education.
Alternate paths to graduation for general education students	Students who do not meet the exit exam requirements may receive a high school diploma by demonstrating mastery of state academic content standards through alternative methods recommended by the ACE Steering Committee. Specific recommendations have not yet been determined.
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for students with disabilities	Students with individualized education programs (IEPs) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act will be exempt from the exit exam requirements unless taking the exams is part of the student's IEP.
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for English language learners	Students who do not meet the exit exam requirements may receive a high school diploma by demonstrating mastery of state academic content standards through alternative methods to be determined.
Cut score changes in past 18 months	No
Must private school students pass?	No
Must home-schooled students pass?	No
Test used by colleges or universities for undergraduate admissions?	No. The ACE task force discussed the possibility of the Algebra II and English III results being considered in decisions for undergraduate admissions, but no policy has been established.
Accept other states' test scores	The state board of education will adopt rules providing for necessary student exceptions to and exemptions from the requirements of the ACE Act of 2006.
Effects on local course offerings	Local schools will be compelled to offer the tested courses annually.
Accommodations for students with disabilities	<p>Allowable accommodations for students with IEPs or section 504 plans include accommodations in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test timing, such as more frequent breaks or testing over multiple days • Scheduling, such as a different time of day for testing • Setting, such as small group or individual administration • Presentation formats, such as large-print editions or repetition of directions • Response formats, such as visual aids or amplification • Use of assistive technologies <p>Additional accommodations are described in the Student Assessment section of the Oklahoma State Department of Education Web site at http://sde.state.ok.us/home/defaultie.html.</p>
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes

Accommodations for English language learners	<p>Allowable accommodations for English language learners include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marking of answers in the test booklet (teacher or aide transcribes to answer sheet) • Use of a bilingual dictionary (with no definitions) • Testing in a separate room • Small group administration • Answering of queries as described in the test manual • Translation of written or oral directions only <p>Additional accommodations are described in the Student Assessment section of http://sde.state.ok.us/home/defaultie.html.</p>
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes
Teacher professional development related to exit exam	Curriculum and assessment directors with the state department of education provide professional development for implementation of state academic content standards. Assessment tools—including test blueprints, released test items, and item and test specifications—are available at the Web address at the end of the profile.
Student preparation materials for exit exam	The state currently provides assessment guides, released items, and practice tests in Algebra I, Biology I, English II, and U.S. history. These materials are available on the Web site at the end of the profile.
Must districts provide remediation?	<p>Under the ACE Act of 2005, students who do not achieve passing scores will be provided with remediation options that will include, but not be limited to, summer academies, tutoring, and online coursework.</p> <p>Beginning in the 2007-08 school year, each student who does not score at least at the satisfactory level on the 8th grade criterion-referenced tests in reading and mathematics will be provided with remediation to assist the student in performing at least at the satisfactory level on the end-of-instruction tests administered in high school.</p> <p>The state department of education will provide information about best practices for remediation and interventions. School districts will monitor results of the remediation and interventions implemented and report the findings to the state department of education.</p> <p>The ACE Steering Committee will advise the state board of education on intervention and remediation strategies and delivery methods for students who do not meet the mandated standards.</p>
Must students participate in remediation?	Yes. Students who do not attain at least a satisfactory score on any end-of-instruction test will be provided with remediation and the opportunity to retake the test until a satisfactory score is attained on the tests of Algebra I, English II, and two of the other tests required or on an approved alternative test.
State funding for remediation	Funding is anticipated to be proposed in 2007 legislation.

Are test items released?	Yes. Released test items are available in the Student Assessment section of the Web site at the end of the profile.
Exit exam used for No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?	The first test administration of the Algebra I and English II exams are used for NCLB accountability.
Same cut score for graduation and NCLB?	To be determined
Initial pass rates	The exit exam requirement will begin with students in 9 th grade in 2008-09, so pass rates are not yet available.
Cumulative pass rates	Not available
Major changes in exit exam policy	Yes, as described in several sections of this profile
Evaluations of state exit exam	None to date. The 2006 legislation requires the state board of education to review, realign, and recalibrate the EOI tests as necessary, and to conduct an ongoing study that compares the EOI test content and performance descriptors with those of other states.
State test contractor	CTB McGraw Hill
Web site for exit exam information	http://sde.state.ok.us



South Carolina

High School Assessment Program (HSAP)

Type of test	<p>The High School Assessment Program (HSAP) English language arts and mathematics tests are standards-based.</p> <p>The results of the HSAP in English language arts and math have been used to determine adequate yearly progress under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) since the fall 2004 reporting for NCLB.</p> <p>South Carolina expects to use the state’s end-of-course assessment in physical science for NCLB science assessment purposes at the high school level, pending the outcome of peer review.</p>
Purpose	<p>The HSAP tests assess what students are expected to know and be able to do in English language arts and mathematics. HSAP scores are used to produce school and district performance data that are published each year and to determine adequate yearly progress for NCLB. Passing the HSAP English language arts and mathematics tests also fulfills the exit examination requirement for a South Carolina high school diploma.</p>
Year first administered	<p>Prior to the HSAP, the state administered the Basic Skills Assessment Program (BSAP), a minimum competency exam, as its first exit exam. The BSAP exam was first given in 1986.</p> <p>Beginning in spring 2004, the HSAP was gradually phased in as the state exit examination. The HSAP replaced the BSAP for all students after the final BSAP administration in summer 2005.</p> <p>The HSAP was field-tested for exit exam purposes in spring 2003. Results from this same administration were also used for NCLB accountability.</p>
Year diplomas first withheld	<p>For most graduating seniors, 2006 is the first year that diplomas have been withheld based on the HSAP. A small number of students who completed their course credits for high school graduation before spring 2006 were required to pass the HSAP in order to graduate before spring 2006.</p> <p>Prior to the HSAP, students had to pass the BSAP to receive a diploma.</p>
Subjects tested	<p>English language arts and mathematics</p> <p>Beginning with the graduating class of 2010, it is anticipated that students will be required to pass a high school credit course in science and a course in United States history (in which end-of-course examinations are administered) as part of the requirements for receiving a South Carolina high school diploma.</p>

Types of questions	Multiple-choice, constructed-response, extended-response
Calculators permitted on math test	<p>All students may use calculators on the math test, although the questions were not written to require a calculator. Students are also allowed to use graph paper and reference information sheets with formulas on the math test.</p> <p>Student may use a dictionary or thesaurus when writing a composition for the extended-response question in the English language arts test.</p>
Grade first administered	HSAP tests are first administered to students in the second spring after their initial enrollment in 9 th grade; therefore, an individual student's first attempt could occur in any grade after or including 9 th grade.
Grade(s) exam aligned to	The test is aligned to standards that a student would have an opportunity to learn by the second spring after initial enrollment in 9 th grade. These standards include selected standards across many grades but do not include 11 th or 12 th grade standards that students would not have had an opportunity to learn.
Number of retakes allowed before end of grade 12	<p>Students who do not pass one or both HSAP tests will be scheduled to retake the test(s) not passed at the next scheduled administration. The HSAP is administered each spring and fall. Students who are expected to graduate before the beginning of the next school year are also eligible to participate in a summer administration.</p> <p>Testing participation of students with individualized education programs (IEPs) is determined annually by their IEP teams if the students meet specified criteria.</p>
Retakes after grade 12	A summer administration of the HSAP is available for students who are expected to graduate by the beginning of the next school year. Eligible students enrolled in South Carolina public adult education programs can continue to retake the exam without age limits.
Alternate paths to graduation for general education students	No. Students who do not pass the HSAP may receive a certificate of attendance.
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for students with disabilities	No, although students with serious cognitive impairments who cannot participate in the HSAP with accommodations or modifications may meet the criteria for taking the SC-Alt, an alternate assessment. Students who participate in the alternate assessment do not receive a South Carolina high school diploma. Students with disabilities who do not pass the HSAP may receive a certificate of attendance.
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for English language learners	No. Students who have limited English proficiency are not required to take the HSAP English language arts test during the first year they are enrolled in a U.S. school, but they must still pass the test to meet the graduation requirement.
Cut score changes in past 18 months	No
Must private school students pass?	Generally no; however, students who are placed in a private school by a local school district or public agency are tested

Must home-schooled students pass?	Students who are in home-school programs approved by the local school district, who are homebound, or who receive home-based instruction participate in the exit exam.
Test used by colleges or universities for undergraduate admissions?	Typically no, although there have been cases in which a student's acceptance into a university or college is provisionally based on passing the exit exam
Accept other states' test scores	No
Effects on local course offerings	None, other than requiring school districts to provide remediation (see item on remediation below)
Accommodations for students with disabilities	<p>Accommodations are available related to exam setting, timing, scheduling, presentation, response options, spelling, appropriate supplemental materials and devices, and other special requests.</p> <p>Customized forms are produced for students who read classroom materials in Braille, have difficulty reading text in a standard-size format, need to highlight text, need one item per page, or need a signed administration.</p>
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Accommodations are essentially the same across testing programs.
Accommodations for English language learners	<p>Limited English proficient (LEP) students are allowed to use testing accommodations approved by the state, including the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word-for-word bilingual dictionaries • Special test preparation covering test format, directions, use of answer documents, and test-taking strategies • Directions in students' native language • Individual or small group administration • Oral administration of the math exam • Additional time during the testing day <p>The HSAP tests are not available in alternate language formats.</p> <p>LEP students who pass the exam using accommodations still receive a regular diploma.</p>
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes

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Teacher professional development related to exit exam	<p>The South Carolina Department of Education has provided statewide information sessions to instructional personnel on the HSAP tests in general, as well as on instructional strategies for each subject tested.</p> <p>In addition, the Department of Education provides schools with <i>NCS Mentor for High Schools</i> software. The software package includes examples of scored student responses to HSAP English language arts and math test items, with annotations and color overlays to explain the assigned scores. Practice papers allow users to practice scoring a set of responses and check their scores. Teachers are encouraged to use this software in their classroom instruction to help students understand how their HSAP tests will be scored.</p> <p>Schools and districts also receive reports detailing areas on the test in which the students need improvement. This allows schools to tailor instruction to meet students' needs.</p>
Student preparation materials for exit exam	<p>At the beginning of each school year, an informational brochure is distributed to 7th grade students and to students who are expected to take the HSAP for the first time the following spring. After testing, students receive individual score reports that detail the areas in which they need improvement.</p> <p>Prototype test forms for both English language arts and mathematics are available to students and the general public on the Department Web site.</p> <p>The Department of Education also provides schools with <i>NCS Mentor for High School</i> software, described above in the item on teacher preparation. This software can help students, as well as teachers, understand how HSAP tests are scored.</p>
Must districts provide remediation?	State law requires school districts to provide students with remediation in the subject or subjects not passed on the HSAP tests. This remediation must be provided before the students' next attempt at the test.
Must students participate in remediation?	Yes. Students who are enrolled in school or an adult education center are required to participate in remediation.
State funding for remediation	For school year 2005-06, the state legislature approved \$120,436,576 for remediation efforts by local school districts, including remediation for the exit exam.
Are test items released?	In early 2006, the Department of Education released a prototype form for each HSAP subject tested. These forms included some previously administered test items. Released items can be found on the Department's new Web site at www.ed.sc.gov .
Exit exam used for No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?	<p>Results from the initial administration of the HSAP are included in calculations for adequate yearly progress under NCLB. HSAP results in English language arts and math have been used for NCLB reporting since fall 2004.</p> <p>South Carolina expects to use the state's end-of-course assessment in physical science to meet the NCLB requirement for high school science testing, pending the outcome of a peer review.</p>

Same cut score for graduation and NCLB?

No. The cut score for the exit exam requirement (level 2) is lower than the cut score for NCLB proficiency (level 3).

Initial pass rates, spring 2005

Percentage of Students Passing on the First Try, 2005		
Student Group	English/Language Arts	Math
All students	86.2%	76.4%
Male	82.6%	75.0%
Female	89.8%	77.6%
White	93.0%	87.1%
African American	77.3%	61.3%
Latino	76.5%	69.0%
Asian	91.2%	89.9%
Native American	87.2%	77.6%
Limited English proficient	53.6%	56.4%
Free or reduced-price lunch eligible	77.1%	63.0%
Students with disabilities	44.3%	31.3%
Migrant students	77.8%	61.1%
Passing score (scale of 100-320)	200 (level II)	200 (level II)

Cumulative pass rates, 2005

Cumulative results will not be available until November 2006.

Major changes in exit exam policy

No

Evaluations of state exit exam

The U.S. Department of Education conducted a peer review of the South Carolina assessment system and sent the state superintendent a letter of approval on February 15, 2006. The results of this evaluation are available at www.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/nclbfinalassess/sc2.html.

State test contractor

American Institutes for Research

Web site for exit exam information

www.ed.sc.gov



Tennessee

Gateway Examinations

Type of test	The Gateway Examinations are end-of-course, criterion-referenced exams. They are also standards-based exams because they align with the state's content standards.
Purpose	The Gateway Examinations are used as both a diploma assessment requirement and part of the student's grade in the associated course.
Year first administered	2001-02
Year diplomas first withheld	2005
Subjects tested	Algebra I, Biology I, English II
Types of questions	Multiple-choice
Calculators permitted on math test	Yes
Grade first administered	Varies. Students take the exams after completing the course associated with the exam. Most students take the exams in high school, although students who take Algebra I in 7 th or 8 th grade may take the exam when they complete the course.
Grade(s) exam aligned to	10 th grade standards
Number of retakes allowed before end of grade 12	Three administrations each year; students may continue to retake the test at each administration until they pass
Retakes after grade 12	Students who have met all graduation requirements except passing the exit exams may retake the exams after completing 12 th grade, with no limit on age or number of retakes, and still receive a regular diploma.
Alternate paths to graduation for general education students	The state does not allow students to earn a regular high school diploma by passing a substitute test or submitting a waiver or appeal. However, students who do not receive a regular diploma because they could not pass the exit exams are eligible to receive a certificate of attendance.
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for students with disabilities	A special education diploma is available for students with disabilities who do not receive a regular diploma because they could not pass the exit exams.
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for English language learners	No, but English language learners who do not receive a regular diploma because they could not pass the exit exams are eligible for the certificate of attendance available to all students

Cut score changes in past 18 months	No
Must private school students pass?	Only students in Category 1 accredited private schools must comply with exit exam requirements. Category 1 schools are accredited by the state, and their students are required to meet the same diploma requirements as students in public schools.
Must home-schooled students pass?	Home-schooled students enrolled in a course for which there is an end-of course assessment are expected to take the assessment.
Test used by colleges or universities for undergraduate admissions?	Neither public universities nor community colleges use the Gateway Exams to determine undergraduate admissions or course placement. However, students cannot be admitted to a public university or community college without having received a high school diploma.
Accept other states' test scores	No
Effects on local course offerings	No data are available on this issue.
Accommodations for students with disabilities	<p>Students with disabilities may use accommodations outlined in their individualized education program, including the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Braille or large print materials • Alternate settings • Visual aids • Auditory aids • Multiple testing sessions • Flexible scheduling • A scribe • Extended time
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes
Accommodations for English language learners	<p>The state allows accommodations for English language learners such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extended time • Breaks during testing • Multiple testing sessions • Small group administration • Use of dictionaries and glossaries • Administration of test instructions in students' native language
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes
Teacher professional development related to exit exam	<p>The state has supported or established specific professional development programs to help teachers administer and prepare for the exit exams. These include programs to train teachers in teaching test-taking skills and interpreting test results, to familiarize them with the content of the exams, and to help them with curriculum development in reading.</p> <p>The state has also developed curriculum guides, lesson plans, practice tests, and information guides explaining the tests.</p>

Student preparation materials for exit exam	The state department of education has developed curriculum guides, lesson plans, practice tests, preparation brochures, and information guides explaining the tests.
Must districts provide remediation?	State policy requires schools to offer remediation to students who fail an exam. Remediation must be content-based and research-based; it must be based on students' needs and cannot simply be a repetition of the course.
Must students participate in remediation?	No
State funding for remediation	No
Are test items released?	No
Exit exam used for No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?	Tennessee uses the results from the first time a student takes the Graduation Exams to meet the requirements of NCLB. Starting in 2007-08, the science test will also be used to meet NCLB requirements.
Same cut score for graduation and NCLB?	Yes

Initial pass rates, 2005

Percentage of Student Passing on First Try, 2005			
Student Group	English II	Algebra I	Biology I
All students	90.5%	73.2%	95.0%
White	93.5%	83.2%	97.3%
African American	83.2%	53.7%	89.0%
Latino	85.0%	73.0%	94.1%
Asian	92.7%	83.4%	96.7%
Native American	82.5%	67.4%	91.0%
English language learners	69.5%	60.0%	86.4%
Free or reduced-price lunch eligible	84.3%	62.7%	91.2%
Students with disabilities	62.0%	38.5%	77.0%
Passing score*	30	24	19
<p>*The scores shown are presented as number correct scores; there are 50 operational items on the test. The number correct score for proficient performance changes from administration to administration based on the test construct. The state's standard setting process established a scale score, which is converted to the number correct score.</p> <p>Note: The Graduation Exams have three performance levels: advanced, proficient, and below proficient. The percentages shown on the table represent students scoring at the proficient or advanced level.</p>			

**Cumulative pass rates, 2001 cohort
(generally the class of 2005)**

Percentage of Students Passing by the End of 12 th Grade	
All students	89.9%
White	93.1%
African American	79.9%
Latino	88.8%
Asian	95.2%
Native American	87.8%
English language learners	80.1%
Free or reduced-price lunch eligible	81.5%
Students with disabilities	20.6%

Major changes in exit exam policy

No

Evaluations of state exit exam

No

State test contractor

Pearson Educational Measurement

Web site for exit exam information
www.tennessee.gov/education/assessment/



Texas



Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) and Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills-Inclusive (TAKS-I)

Type of test	The state considers the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) and the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills-Inclusive (TAKS-I) to be standards-based exams.
Purpose	<p>The TAKS is the state's exit exam. Students must pass all four of its sections to graduate from a Texas public high school.</p> <p>The TAKS-I is a new assessment administered to special education students for whom the TAKS is not appropriate. The TAKS-I was developed in response to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act requirement that special education students be given the same testing opportunities as general education students. Previously, Texas had no statewide alternative assessment for these students at the exit level. The TAKS-I is not a statewide graduation requirement, although admission, review, and dismissal committees may choose to make it a graduation requirement for an individual student. Special education students who take and pass the TAKS-I assessments may receive regular high school diplomas.</p>
Year first administered	<p>The TAKS was administered for the first time in spring 2003, when it replaced the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills, which had served as the state assessment since 1990.</p> <p>The TAKS-I was administered for the first time in spring 2006.</p>
Year diplomas first withheld	<p>In spring 2005, the state began withholding diplomas for students who had not passed the TAKS.</p> <p>Diplomas are not withheld for failure to pass the TAKS-I, but regular diplomas may be awarded to special education students who pass all four tests.</p>
Subjects tested	English language arts (an integrated reading/writing test), mathematics, science, social studies
Types of questions	Multiple-choice, short-answer, writing prompt/essay
Calculators permitted on math test	All students are allowed to use calculators on the math test. School districts must ensure that students have access to a graphing calculator to take the exam.
Grade first administered	11 th
Grade(s) exam aligned to	Varies. The TAKS measures content from various high school courses, including algebra, geometry, integrated physics and chemistry, U.S. history, world history, world geography, and English III.



Number of retakes allowed before end of grade 12	Four retest opportunities, in addition to the initial test administration
Retakes after grade 12	Students who meet all graduation requirements except passing the TAKS may continue to retake the exam after 12 th grade without limits on age or number of retakes.
Alternate paths to graduation for general education students	No
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for students with disabilities	Some students with disabilities may be exempted from the TAKS if their admission, review, and dismissal committee determines that the test is an inappropriate measure of their academic progress. In spring 2006, the TAKS-I alternative assessment was administered for the first time to special education students in this group. Students who pass all four sections of the TAKS-I test may obtain a regular high school diploma. Students with disabilities who do not take or pass either the TAKS or TAKS-I receive a certificate of completion.
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for English language learners	Limited English proficient (LEP) students are not eligible for an exemption from exit-level testing due to their language status. Like other Texas public school students, they must perform satisfactorily on the exit exam to meet graduation requirements. Although exemptions are not permitted, the Language Proficiency Assessment Committee may postpone the exit exam administration for LEP students who first enrolled in a U.S. school no more than 12 months before the exit exam administration. This deferral is called an exit-level LEP postponement.
Cut score changes in past 18 months	In spring 2005, the scale scores required to pass the exit level assessments were increased to one standard error of measurement below the scores recommended by a state panel.
Must private school students pass?	No
Must home-schooled students pass?	No
Test used by colleges or universities for undergraduate admissions?	Some community colleges and public universities use TAKS results to determine admissions and course placement. By law, the TAKS must include a higher education readiness component (HERC), which consists of higher standards than those required for high school graduation. To be considered “college ready,” students must achieve a score of 2200 on the English language arts and mathematics tests, with a writing subscore of at least 3. Students who meet the HERC standard receive a statement to this effect on their confidential student reports. They are also exempt from other state-mandated college readiness testing.
Accept other states’ test scores	Texas currently has no reciprocity agreements with other states. However, the Texas Legislature recently passed a bill and the Commissioner of Education recently implemented rules that allow students who transfer from another state after January 1 of the year in which they expect to graduate to substitute alternative exit-level assessments for the TAKS. The only alternative assessments approved for this purpose are the SAT verbal and mathematics tests and the ACT English and mathematics tests. These tests may be substituted for the respective TAKS sections, but eligible students must still pass the exit-level science and social studies TAKS to satisfy graduation testing requirements.

Effects on local course offerings	It is likely that school districts have placed more emphasis on courses with statewide assessments used for state and federal accountability or for graduation or grade-level promotion.
Accommodations for students with disabilities	<p>Accommodations are based on students' needs and whether the student routinely receives the accommodation in classroom instruction and testing. The state permits a variety of accommodations on the TAKS for students with disabilities and other students. Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signing of instructions • Magnifying devices and place markers • Small group or individual administration • Large print or Braille test materials • Changes in response methods • Tape recorded or typed responses to written composition or open-ended questions <p>More information about accommodations can be found in the <i>District and Campus Coordinator Manual</i> at www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/resources/guides/coormanual/takso6.pdf.</p>
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Accommodations may vary by grade and subject.
Accommodations for English language learners	<p>There are no accommodations specifically for English language learners on the exit-level tests, but these students may use the same accommodations allowed for other students.</p> <p>In 2004, Texas implemented linguistically accommodated testing (LAT) for recent immigrants who have limited English proficiency and are currently exempt from the Texas assessment program. This assessment system allows districts to use approved linguistic accommodations for limited English proficient students. Accommodations must be based on students' individual needs and what they are routinely provided with during instruction. Examples of approved accommodations for the TAKS math test or State-Developed Alternative Assessment II include reading assistance, bilingual dictionaries, translations of words, bilingual glossaries, and simplified terms. The LAT, however, is available only for grades 3-8 and 10 and not at the exit level. Districts may not provide accommodations that will invalidate the test, such as providing the student with explanations of mathematics terms, examples, or visuals, or simplifying mathematics terminology, concepts, or skills.</p>
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	No

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Teacher professional development related to exit exam	<p>The state has supported programs and provided extensive training to help teachers administer and prepare for the TAKS. Programs include a Teacher Quality Grant that supports efforts to improve teachers' knowledge of the content in state curriculum and assessment standards.</p> <p>Teachers are also encouraged to participate in educator committees, which provide them with additional professional development on the test development process.</p> <p>In addition, information and publications about the tests are available on the state education agency Web site at www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/teachers.html. Examples include information on the organization of the tests, the objectives assessed, the test development process, and the history of the testing program.</p>
Student preparation materials for exit exam	Students who fail the TAKS receive a comprehensive summer remediation study guide and a personalized study guide. Released tests, along with answer keys and scoring guides, are provided online.
Must districts provide remediation?	Districts are required to provide intensive instruction to any student who does not pass one or more of the assessments.
Must students participate in remediation?	No
State funding for remediation	State Compensatory Education funding, totaling about \$1.1 billion per year, is provided to school districts to serve at-risk students, including those in exit-level grades. These funds, however, are distributed among all grade levels. One criterion specified in state law for determining whether a student is at risk is that the student "did not perform satisfactorily on an assessment instrument." Districts must provide "accelerated instruction" to these students and must document the effectiveness of their programs in reducing the dropout rate.
Are test items released?	All tests, answer keys, and scoring guides are released every other year. Released tests are available at www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/resources/release/ .
Exit exam used for No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?	No. Grade 10 assessments in math and English language arts, rather than the grade 11 exit exams, are used to fulfill NCLB testing requirements.
Same cut score for graduation and NCLB?	Not applicable

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Initial pass rates, 2005

Percentage of Students Passing on the First Try, 2005				
Student Group	English/ Language Arts	Math	Science	Social Studies
All students	87%	72%	71%	91%
White	93%	83%	84%	96%
African American	82%	54%	55%	88%
Latino	80%	61%	57%	85%
Asian	92%	89%	86%	95%
Native American	88%	75%	77%	95%
English language learners	34%	35%	29%	53%
Economically disadvantaged	79%	59%	56%	85%
Students with disabilities	58%	38%	40%	71%
Passing score (scales vary by subject and test administration)				
	2100	2100	2100	2100

Note: The TAKS has three performance levels: commended performance, met the standard, and did not meet the standard.

Cumulative pass rates, 2005

Percentage of Students Passing by the End of 12 th Grade	
All students	91%
White	95%
African American	85%
Latino	86%
Asian	95%
Native American	90%
English language learners	60%
Economically disadvantaged	84%
Students with disabilities	60%

Evaluations of state exit exam

Achieve, Inc. conducted an evaluation of the Texas assessment program in 2002. The report can be found at <http://www.achieve.org/files/TestGraduation-FinalReport.pdf>.

State test contractor

Pearson Educational Measurement

Web site for exit exam information

www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/



Virginia

Standards of Learning (SOL) End-of-Course Exams



Type of test	End-of-course
Purpose	<p>The Standards of Learning (SOL) end-of-course tests are used to verify the knowledge and skills that a student has learned in a high school course. Students who pass a class and the associated SOL end-of-course test are said to have earned a “verified” credit. Students must acquire a certain number of verified credits to earn a standard or advanced studies diploma. Certain SOL end-of-course tests are also used to comply with the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).</p> <p>Students must take the end-of-course test associated with any class that they take. Because of this policy, students may take more end-of-course tests than they need for graduation. For example, a student must have two verified credits in mathematics for an advanced studies diploma. A student might take Algebra I, geometry, and Algebra II and would take the tests for each of these classes. However, only two of these tests would be used to meet the verified credit requirement.</p>
Year first administered	1998
Year diplomas first withheld	2004
Subjects tested	English (reading and writing), Algebra I, Algebra II, geometry, biology, earth science, chemistry, world history to 1500, world history from 1500 to the present, Virginia and U.S. history, and world geography
Types of questions	Multiple-choice, plus a writing prompt on the English: Writing test
Calculators permitted on math test	All students are allowed to use graphing calculators on the mathematics tests.
Grade first administered	Varies. Tests are administered whenever students complete the associated course. For example, a student who takes Algebra I in middle school would take the Algebra I end-of-course test at that time.
Grade(s) exam aligned to	The SOL tests are aligned to content standards for specific tested courses.
Number of retakes allowed before end of grade 12	At least three retake opportunities each year. In addition, students who fail the exam with a score of 375-399 do not need to wait for the next regularly scheduled retest but may retake the test immediately using an alternate form (expedited retake policy).
Retakes after grade 12	Students who have completed all graduation requirements except passing the exit exam may continue to retake the exams an unlimited number of times as long as they are no older than 20 for general education students and 22 for students with disabilities and English language learners.

Alternate paths to graduation for general education students	<p>Although the state does not have a process for students to request a waiver or appeal the exit exams, students may earn a regular diploma by taking substitute tests. The substitute tests include the Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, SAT II, TOEFL, APIEL, Cambridge International Examination, ACT, and CLEP tests. Typically, fewer than 1% of students use the substitute tests to attain a high school diploma.</p> <p>Students who cannot pass the tests may receive a certificate of completion or earn a GED.</p>
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for students with disabilities	<p>Students with disabilities who do not meet the requirements for a standard or advanced diploma but meet the credit and literacy and numeracy requirements established by the state board of education may receive a Modified Standard Diploma.</p> <p>Students with disabilities who do not meet the requirements for other diplomas but have completed the objectives in their individualized education program may receive a special diploma.</p>
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for English language learners	No, other than those available to all students
Cut score changes in past 18 months	In 2005, Virginia implemented end-of-course English: Reading and Algebra II tests that were developed according to new test blueprints reflecting revised content standards. The state board of education adopted new cut scores for the revised tests. The adoption of the new cut scores was part of the scheduled revision of content standards and assessments.
Must private school students pass?	No
Must home-schooled students pass?	No
Test used by colleges or universities for undergraduate admissions?	No
Accept other states' test scores	Not at present, although recent revisions to state regulations may allow scores from other states' tests to be used in the future
Effects on local course offerings	Information on this issue is not available at the state level.
Accommodations for students with disabilities	<p>Accommodations include but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breaks during testing • Individual or small group testing • Reading aloud of test directions and test items • Use of a scribe • Use of audio versions of the exams • Braille or large print test materials
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes

Accommodations for English language learners	<p>Accommodations include, but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breaks during testing • Individual or small group testing • Reading aloud of test directions and test items in English • Use of a scribe • Bilingual dictionary
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	Yes
Teacher professional development related to exit exam	<p>The state has supported or established specific professional development programs, such as activities to familiarize teachers with the content of the exam, help them use instructional strategies based on resources developed by the state education department, and train them to interpret and use test results.</p> <p>The state has also developed curriculum guides, lesson plans, practice tests, and online tutoring in English: Reading and Algebra I.</p>
Student preparation materials for exit exam	The state has developed tutorials and computer-based programs.
Must districts provide remediation?	School districts must provide students who fail an exit exam with information, such as optional remediation opportunities, future test dates, and implications for course taking.
Must students participate in remediation?	No
State funding for remediation	Data are unavailable.
Are test items released?	Yes. Items are posted online at www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Assessment/releasedtests.html .
Exit exam used for No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?	Scores from the first time students take the SOL end-of-course tests in English: Reading, Algebra I, geometry, and Algebra II are used to meet the testing requirements of NCLB. Starting in 2007-08, the earth science, biology, and chemistry tests will be used for NCLB purposes.
Same cut score for graduation and NCLB?	Yes

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Initial pass rates, 2005

Percentage of Students Passing on the First Try (or Expedited Retest), 2005						
Student Group	English: Reading	English: Writing	Algebra I	Algebra II	Geometry	Earth Science
All students	85%	88%	84%	87%	81%	75%
White	91%	93%	88%	89%	87%	85%
African American	72%	77%	75%	77%	63%	58%
Latino	75%	78%	77%	81%	72%	61%
Asian	88%	92%	93%	76%	89%	82%
Native American	89%	89%	81%	76%	83%	77%
English language learners	62%	65%	80%	85%	71%	49%
Students with disabilities	57%	61%	58%	67%	56%	51%
Passing score (scale of 0-600)	400	400	400	400	400	400
(continued)						
Student Group	Biology	Chemistry	World History I	World History II	VA & US History	Geography
All students	79%	86%	82%	86%	88%	70%
White	88%	90%	88%	90%	93%	78%
African American	62%	73%	67%	74%	77%	54%
Latino	60%	71%	74%	75%	80%	67%
Asian	83%	87%	91%	93%	91%	84%
Native American	78%	84%	82%	84%	90%	69%
English language learners	53%	67%	74%	78%	76%	57%
Students with disabilities	51%	62%	59%	62%	66%	41%
Passing score (scale of 0-600)	400	400	400	400	400	400
Note: Pass rates include first time test-takers and students who pass the test within the same test administration through the expedited retake policy. Data for the summer and fall administrations are not included. The SOL end-of-course exams have three performance levels: advanced, proficient, and fail/does not meet standard.						
Note: Further information about pass rates on end-of-course SOL tests for the spring 2005 administration may be found at www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/src/SOLassessments.shtml .						

Cumulative pass rates, 2005	Not available
Major changes in exit exam policy	No
Evaluations of state exit exam	The state has not conducted an external review of its SOL end-of-course exams. However, a committee of Virginia educators reviews each test item and test before it is administered.
State test contractor	To date, Harcourt Assessment has handled test development, administration, scoring, and reporting for paper/pencil tests, while Pearson Educational Measurement has handled online delivery of SOL tests. Beginning with the fall 2006 administration, Pearson Educational Measurement will have full responsibility for the entire Virginia testing program.
Web site for exit exam information	www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Assessment/home.shtml



Washington

Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL)

Type of test	Standards-based
Purpose	To assess student learning toward meeting state standards in reading, writing, and mathematics
Year first administered	1999 (administered to students in 10 th grade)
Year diplomas first withheld	The class of 2008 will be the first required to pass the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) to receive a diploma. (The science test will become a graduation requirement in 2010.)
Subjects tested	Reading, writing, math, and science
Types of questions	Multiple-choice, short-answer, and extended-response questions for the reading, science, and mathematics tests; and two writing prompts for the writing test
Calculators permitted on math test	Yes, on some portions of the math test
Grade first administered	10 th (9 th graders can also take the test voluntarily)
Grade(s) exam aligned to	10 th grade standards
Number of retakes allowed before end of grade 12	Two retakes per year, starting in the summer after the first administration. The state will fund up to four retakes for students who have not passed the exam. After four retakes, students may continue to take the exam at their own expense. Students may also retake the exam at their own expense if they have met the standard but wish to improve their score.
Retakes after grade 12	Students who have met all graduation requirements except passing the WASL may continue to retake the exam after completing 12 th grade.
Alternate paths to graduation for general education students	Three alternative methods to meet the state's learning standards have been approved by the legislature: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assembling a collection of classroom-based evidence of a student's learning that includes specified work samples; or• Comparing a student's grades in certain classes with the grades of other students who took the same classes and met the standard; or• Meeting a specific cut score on the PSAT, SAT, or ACT tests. The cut score will be determined by the state board of education.

Alternate paths to graduation specifically for students with disabilities	Students with disabilities for whom the WASL is not an appropriate assessment may use other assessments commensurate with their individualized education programs. Students with disabilities may take the Washington Alternate Assessment System, but those who do receive a Certificate of Individual Achievement.
Alternate paths to graduation specifically for English language learners	No
Cut score changes in past 18 months	The reading cut score in grade 10 was lowered in 2005.
Must private school students pass?	No
Must home-schooled students pass?	No
Test used by colleges or universities for undergraduate admissions?	Some state universities consider WASL results when making admissions decisions.
Accept other states' test scores	In Senate Bill 6475, the state legislature instructed the education department to develop guidelines and appeal procedures for students who transfer from other states. Appeals will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, but students must demonstrate that they have achieved the requisite skills. Students will demonstrate their achievement by presenting passing scores on another state's test or achieving predetermined scores on the ACT or SAT.
Effects on local course offerings	More classes are being offered in the tested subjects, particularly during the summer.
Accommodations for students with disabilities	<p>The state allows accommodations that include but are not limited to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extended time • Use of physical supports • Oral answers • Use of Braille or large-print testing materials • Use of calculators
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	The accommodations are similar to those allowed on other state tests, except that students are not allowed to use a calculator or certain accommodations in writing on other statewide tests.
Accommodations for English language learners	<p>The state allows accommodations for English language learners, including the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having instructions read in the student's native language • Having test items read in English except in the reading section of the WASL • Using a dictionary or thesaurus
Are these accommodations the same for exit exams and other statewide assessments?	These accommodations are similar to those allowed on other statewide tests, except for the use of a dictionary or thesaurus on writing tests.

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Teacher professional development related to exit exam	Many resources are available on the state department of education Web site at www.k12.wa.us/assessment/default.aspx . These include sample tests, scoring guides for released items, and curriculum materials. In addition, the state department of education provides many training sessions throughout the year on the assessments and content standards.
Student preparation materials for exit exam	The state provides sample tests, scoring guides for released items, curriculum materials, and other resources on the education department Web site.
Must districts provide remediation?	Districts are required to prepare plans that include courses, competencies, and steps needed to meet the standards for students who do not pass the required WASL tests.
Must students participate in remediation?	No
State funding for remediation	The 2006 legislature approved a supplemental budget of \$28.6 million for remediation programs in 2006-07.
Are test items released?	Some test questions with sample student responses, as well as entire sample tests, are posted every year on the education department Web site at www.k12.wa.us/assessment/default.aspx . Released items are available from 2001 to 2006.
Exit exam used for No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?	The state is using the initial 10 th grade administration of the WASL to meet the requirements of NCLB. The state will begin to use the results of the WASL science test to meet NCLB requirements in 2010.
Same cut score for graduation and NCLB?	Yes

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Initial pass rates, 2005

Percentage of Students Passing on the First Try, 2005				
Student Group	Reading	Writing	Math	Science
All students	72.9%	65.2%	47.5%	35.8%
White	77.0%	69.2%	52.4%	40.5%
African American	53.7%	47.9%	20.4%	12.1%
Latino	53.1%	43.7%	23.9%	14.2%
Asian	78.8%	72.9%	56.9%	41.6%
Native American	55.8%	45.0%	26.0%	17.9%
English language learners	28.7%	19.7%	11.9%	4.2%
Free or reduced-price lunch eligible	56.4%	46.8%	28.1%	17.7%
Students with disabilities	22.5%	14.3%	6.2%	3.7%
Migrant students	40.7%	27.2%	16.4%	8.2%
Male	68.2%	56.3%	47.1%	35.8%
Female	77.8%	74.4%	47.9%	35.9%
Passing score (scale varies by test and year for reading and math; scale for writing is 0-24)				
	400	17	400	400
Note: The WASL has four levels: levels I and II (does not meet the standard); level III (meets the standard); and level IV (exceeds the standard).				

Cumulative pass rates, 2005

Percentage of Students Passing the WASL by the End of 12 th Grade	
All students	42.3%
White	47.0%
African American	18.1%
Latino	20.1%
Asian	51.9%
Native American	21.7%
English language learners	6.3%
Free or reduced-price lunch eligible	22.9%
Students with disabilities	3.2%

Major changes in exit exam policy	In addition to approving alternate methods to meet the standards, the legislature in Senate Bill 6475 instructed the education department to develop guidelines and appeal procedures for students who transfer from out of state, for students with special cases, and for students who think their assessments were scored incorrectly. In addition, assessment scores were removed from student transcripts.
Evaluations of state exit exam	SRI International completed studies of the reading, writing, and math assessments. The math study is posted at www.k12.wa.us/research/pubdocs/pdf/SRIFinalReport.pdf . The reading and writing studies had not been finalized as of June 2006 but can be obtained by contacting the state department of education and will be posted on the Web when final.
State test contractor	Pearson Educational Measurement
Web site for exit exam information	Office of Washington Superintendent of Public Instruction www.k12.wa.us/GraduationRequirements/default.aspx www.k12.wa.us/assessment/CAAassess.aspx www.k12.wa.us/assessment/WASL/overview.aspx

